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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

35¢ FEBRUARY 1957

The Last Canticle
a short novel by
WALTER M. MILLER, JR.

MANLY WADE WELLMAN
POUL ANDERSON
ARTHUR C. CLARKE
AUGUST DERLETH

EVERY STORY in this issue NEW

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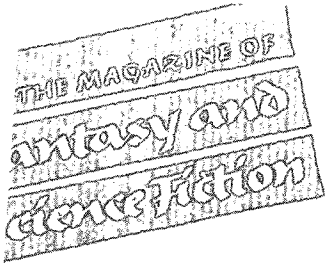

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 12, No. 2 FEBRUARY

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(*Disintegration of a Field-Force*)

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

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Here is the final story in the trilogy which began with A Canticle for Leibowitz *(F&SF, April, 1955) and continued with* And the Light Is Risen *(F&SF, August, 1956). Like its predecessors, it is a story of beauty and of evil, of love and tenderness and sin and violence and hatred, of humor and bitterness, of despair and redemption—in short, a story of Man, once more seen through the compassionate and troubled eyes of the Albertian Order of St. Leibowitz, which now must face the possible annihilation of Earth and learn to guide men on a world elsewhere.*

The Last Canticle

by WALTER M. MILLER, JR

AFTER THE GENERATIONS OF THE darkness came the generations of the light. And they called it the Year of Our Lord 3781—a year of His Peace, so they prayed.

There were spaceships again in that century, and the ships were manned by fuzzy impossibilities that walked on two legs and sprouted tufts of hair in unlikely anatomical regions. They were a garrulous kind. They belonged to a race quite capable of admiring its own image in a mirror, and equally capable of cutting its own throat before the altar of some tribal god, such as the deity of Daily Shaving. It was a species which considered itself to be, basically, a race of divinely inspired toolmakers; any intelligent entity from Arcturus would instantly have discerned them to be, basically, a race of impassioned after-dinner speechmakers.

It was inevitable, it was manifest destiny, so they felt, that such a race should go forth to conquer stars. To conquer them several times, perhaps, and make speeches about the conquest. But too, it was inevitable that the race succumb again, to the old maladies, on new worlds even as on Earth before, in the liturgy of life and the special litany of Man.

VERSICLES BY ADAM AND REJOINDERS BY THE CRUCIFIED:

We are the centuries. We are the chin-choppers and the golly-woppers, and soon we shall dis-

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cuss the amputation of your head. We are your singing garbage men, Sir and Madam, and we march in cadence behind you, chanting rhymes that some think old. Hut two threep foa! Left, left, he-had-a-good-wife-but-he-left, left, left right left! Wir, *as they say in the old country,* marschieren weiter wenn alles in Scherben fallt. *We have your eoliths and your mesoliths and your neoliths. We have your Babylons and your Pompeiis, your Caesars and your chromium-plated vital-ingredient-impregnated artifacts. We have your bloody hatchets and your Hiroshimas. We march in spite of hell, we do. Atrophy, entropy, and* Proteus vulgaris, *telling bawdy jokes about a farm girl name of Eve and a traveling salesman called Lucifer. We bury your dead and their reputations. We bury you. We are the centuries.*

Be born, then, screech at the surgeon's slap, gasp wind, seek manhood, taste a little of godhood, feel pain, give birth, struggle a little while, then succumb. Die. Generation, regeneration, again, again, as in a ritual, with blood-stained vestments and nail-torn hands, children of Merlin, chasing a gleam. Children too of Eve, forever building Edens, kicking them apart in berserk fury because somehow it isn't the same. (AGH! AGH! AGH!—*an idiot screams his mindless anguish amid the rubble. But quickly, let it be inundated by the choir, chanting Alleluias at ninety decibels!*)

Hear, then, the last canticle of the Brethren of the Order of Leibowitz, as sung by the century that swallowed its name.

I

"Lucifer is fallen."

"Lucifer is fallen."

"Lucifer is fallen."

The code words, flashed electrically across the nation, were whispered in conference rooms, and circulated in the form of crisp memoranda withheld from the press. There was a dike of secrecy behind which the words arose in a threatening tide. There was a hole in the dike. There was a Little Dutch Boy Bureaucrat with a finger stuck in the hole. The reporters threw paperweights at him, and his finger grew exceedingly sore.

Toward sunset, there came a dusty wind. The wind came over the mesa and over the small city of Sanly Bowitts. It washed over the surrounding countryside, noisily through the tall corn in the irrigated fields, tearing streamers of blowing sand from the sterile ridges. It moaned about the stonewalls of an ancient abbey and about the aluminum-and-glass walls of the newer abbey. It besmirched the reddening sun with the dirt of the land, and sent dust-

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devils scurrying across the pavement of the six-lane highway that divided the new abbey from the old.

Atop the roof of one of the aluminum-and-glass buildings, a cowled monk sampled the wind. He sampled it with a vacuum cleaner. The vacuum cleaner ate the dust and blew the filtered wind to the intake of an air compressor on the floor below. A window was open near the compressor, and the monk leaned over the edge of the roof so he could hear the sound of the motor. The monk, no longer a youth but not yet middle-aged, wore a short red beard that seemed electrically charged, for it gathered pendant webs and streamers of the dust, and he scratched it irritably from time to time, and once he thrust his chin into the end of the suction hose. The result caused him to mutter explosively, then to cross himself.

The compressor coughed a few times, then died. The monk switched off the vacuum cleaner, disconnected the hoses to the compressor, and dropped them over the edge of the roof; they dangled in the wind from the window below. Struggling with his cowl, he dragged the vacuum cleaner over to the elevator shaft, got inside the cage and closed the gate. There were drifts of dust in the corners of the cage. He went down to the floor below and carried the vacuum cleaner into the room with the compressor. The gage read "maximum normal." When he had got the hoses in and the window closed, he took off his robe, shook out the dust, hung it on a peg, and went over it with the vacuum. There was a big sheet-steel sink at one end of the laboratory workbench. He turned on the cold water and let it fill. He thrust his head into it and washed the mud out of his beard and hair. The water was icy. Dripping and sputtering, he glanced back at the door. Little likelihood of visitors at this hour. He took off his underwear and climbed into the tank, settling back with a shivery sigh.

The door opened and closed. Sister Helene came in with a tray of freshly cleaned glassware. She shrieked and broke six beakers.

"Brother Joshua!"

She dumped the tray on the workbench and fled. Brick-red, muttering penitentially, he vaulted out of the sink and got into his woolen robes without bothering to dry or put on his underwear. When he got to the door, she was already out of the corridor, probably out of the building and halfway to the nun's chapel just down the way. He stood there scratching for a time. The wool itched against bare hide, but he would not risk taking it off again to put on his underwear. Mortified, he hastened to complete his labors.

He emptied the contents of the

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vacuum cleaner onto a piece of wrapping paper and collected a sample of the dust in a phial. He took the phial to the workbench, plugged in a pair of headphones, and held the phial a measured inch in front of a radiation counter while he consulted his watch and listened. It was mostly just dust. But there was a little something extra. He put it aside and went to the compressor, whose tank had a built-in counter. He pressed a stud marked RE-SET. The whirring decimal register flipped back to zero and began counting again. He let it count for a minute, then stopped it and wrote the count on the back of his hand. It was mostly just filtered and compressed air. But there was a little something else.

When he got the lab closed for the evening, he went down to an office on the floor below, wrote the count on a wall chart, then sat at the desk and turned on the visiphone. After a moment, he dialed. There was a buzz, a brief view of the back of an empty desk chair, then the face of the abbot on the screen.

"Yes? Oh, Joshua. I was about to call you. Have you been taking a bath?"

The monk was suddenly glad that the intercom circuit carried only the black and white. He felt his face radiating infrared.

"I'm afraid I was, Father."

"On *this* side of the highway," the abbot drawled acidly, "there is a sign just outside our gate. It says, 'Women Beware. Enter not, lest et cetera.' You've noticed it?"

"Y-yes, of course, Father."

"Do your bathing on *this* side of the sign."

"I—I—I didn't mean to . . ."

"What did you call me about?"

The monk gnawed at a bit of dry skin at the corner of his wind-cracked lips. His eyes fell. He fingered the visiphone dial.

"*Well?* Speak up, man!"

The monk appeared to be hesitating between hope and fright. Knowledge, unexpressed, is only implicit. To say it would be to make it so, explicitly so. Abruptly, he said it.

"Lucifer has fallen."

The abbot closed his eyes. A measureless interval of numb silence passed between them. Father Zerchi began nodding, again and again in that slow, measured manner of a man seeing his worst prophetic hunches confirmed by events.

"They're maniacs," the priest said quietly. "Who has done what to whom?"

"Can't tell that, Father. We recorded the pressure variations, and now the air samples confirm it. The count is up twenty percent over yesterday. But that doesn't tell us where the shot went off. I want to call Spokane, if I can get a circuit. If Lenui detected it too, maybe we can get a fix."

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"Then call Spokane."

"There's nothing in the newscasts?"

"The last newscast was devoted entirely to the marriage of a certain prince to a certain ballerina. Maybe we'll hear in the morning."

"We may hear before then, if it wasn't a test shot. Retaliation. Or counter-retaliation."

The abbot closed his eyes again and spoke in a monotone. "I *will* myself to believe that it was a test shot. If it wasn't a test shot, then humanity's hopelessly insane, congenitally insane, and if humanity's congenitally insane, then why are we doing penance, because Heaven is out, and Limbo is the best any of us can hope for." After a while he opened his eyes again. "God forgive me, I didn't mean it. Call Spokane, then get right over here."

"Certainly, Father."

"*Christus tecum.*"

"*Et cum spiri'tuo.*"

The circuit snapped open. The monk dialed Spokane and sat waiting for the electronic monitors to find him a circuit. He noticed an army of ants climbing single file up one leg of his desk and into the crack above the top drawer. He opened the drawer and looked inside. A piece of honeycake, swarming with ants. He had forgotten to finish his lunch. He took the cake out of the drawer and tossed it in the empty wastebasket. The ants swarmed over his hand.

"Youch!" He brushed at them furiously. The ones yesterday had been the stingless kind. These were angry little berserkers with venomous tails. After he got them off, he stared petulantly into the wastebasket. They were after the cake again, and a safari was crawling up the side.

He opened another drawer and took out a bottle of white powder. He sifted some of the powder into the bottom of the wastebasket. The file of workers started trooping across the sprinkled area.

"Bang," said the monk.

A worker fell out of line. It lay there kicking, then tried to get up. There was a microscopic explosion as a crystal of ammonium nitrate blew off another leg. Others fell out, suffering a similar fate. He kicked the wastebasket. The black horde on the honeycake swarmed down to run in angry circles. They ran over the powder and their legs blew off. Then the excitement died, and the survivors went back to the honeycake.

"Cruel," he grunted at last, and took the cake out of the basket, hoping they'd abandon the lethal place. He tossed the cake out the window. In the bottom of the basket, the workers still milled in furious circles, losing legs, searching for lost ambrosia despite heavy casualties.

"Cruel," he muttered again, and made a quick end of the affair by crumpling several sheets of paper

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and burning them in the basket. The ammonium nitrate did not flash, being an explosive only under certain curious detonating events, such as the footstep of an insect. The flames roasted the angry workers. But still the safari kept climbing the side.

"Your call to Spokane, sir," said a robot voice. "Doctor Lenui is on the line."

The conversation was brief.

"Bang," he said when it was over.

Eighteen centuries to rebuild. Eighteen centuries of nursing civilization back to life. Now after all the rebuilding, after the starships even. Bang.

Joshua shivered, although it was warm in the room. He scratched his beard and felt nastier by the second. It was time to go back across the highway to the older abbey. On this side of the highway, he was a technician at a workbench, where events could be observed dispassionately. In the old stone buildings on the other side of the highway, he was a monk of Christ in the Albertian Order of Saint Leibowitz. He was free to see things passionately over there. To see them darkly, painfully, joyfully, obediently. When he crossed the highway, he crossed a thousand years. Sometimes the transition from technician to monk was a painful one. Why couldn't he just sit here and stay a technician tonight? And let the falling of Lucifer remain a datum, or an inference derived from the chatter of the radiation counters?

But Zerchi had summoned him. He arose abruptly, turned out the lights, and went to obey his ruler.

He emerged from the building into a twilight murky with dust. As he approached the storm fence which surrounded the new buildings, he saw the dim figure of Mrs. Grales standing by the side of the highway just outside the gate. There was not enough light for recognizing anyone but Mrs. Grales, but the form of the woman was unmistakable. Her other head made her silhouette unique. Joshua stopped. He saw her quite often, and spoke to her pleasantly many times. But somehow tonight . . .

After a moment's hesitancy, he chose the subsurface walkway rather than encounter her by crossing the road. He entered a stairwell that led into the tunnel under the highway. He did not dislike Mrs. Grales. Neither was he repelled by her deformity. After eighteen centuries, the world had become blase about such unfortunate oddities and pranks of the genes. But somehow, not tonight . . .

Listen, are we helpless? Are we doomed to do it again and again and again? Have we no choice but to play the Phoenix, in an

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unending sequence of rise and fall? Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Carthage, Rome, the Empires of Charlemagne and the Turk. Ground to dust and plowed with salt. Spain, France, Britain, America—burned into the oblivion of the centuries. And again and again and again.

Are we doomed to it, Lord, chained to the pendulum of our own mad clockwork, helpless to halt its swing?

This time, it will swing us clean to oblivion, thought the abbot.

The feeling of desperation passed abruptly.

"Brother Patrick," he called to his secretary, "come in here, please."

There was no answer from the outer office. He drummed his pencil on the desktop and called again. Then he got up and went to the door. The anteroom was empty. He crossed it and called out down the hall.

"Hey, *Pat!*"

There was only a low mutter of voices from the direction of the stairway. The priest moved toward the sound, but a chubby monk came puffing up the stairs and hurried to meet him, clamoring news.

"Father, something's happened! Some men came and—"

"Never mind. I know. I just talked to Joshua. Lucifer's fallen."

"Wha—?" The scribe stopped in his tracks. His jaw fell slack. He groped for support and stared at the abbot reproachfully.

"Sorry," Zerchi grunted. "I thought you knew. I thought that's what you were about to tell me."

Whatever news the secretary had brought seemed to have been knocked out of him. He only shook his head. "Lucifer . . . !"

"Come on." Father Zerchi strode back into his study and sat down, while Patrick trailed listlessly in behind.

"Get your pad," said the priest. "Take a radiogram for New Rome. '*To His Eminence Sir Eric Cardinal von Hoffstr—*' "

"You can't!" Patrick yelped suddenly. "I'm sorry, I forgot."

"Can't what?" Zerchi gruffed.

"Can't send radiograms. That's what I started to tell you when you hit me with the—when you said—"

"Stop babbling. What do you mean, 'can't send radiograms?' Is something wrong with our transmitter?"

"No. I mean yes. All private stations are shut down. It just happened. Some ZDI men came and took our crystal. They clipped the antenna and padlocked the set. They even cut the power cables to the transmitter shack." The monk fumbled in the sleeve of his robe and brought out an envelope. "Here, Father. It's a copy of the court order. But it doesn't say why."

Zerchi examined the document

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briefly. "It doesn't have to," he muttered. "ZDI. Zone Defense Interior. It doesn't have to say why."

"War?"

"I hoped it was a test shot." The priest swiveled his chair toward the window. "Listen, they're shooting off those damned ground-to-space missiles again, down at the test range. Hear them?"

The sound came faintly across the desert, a sequence of snorts and growls as a battery of rockets shot up to intercept an orbiting target launched from some remote proving ground.

"Target practice again," the monk offered hopefully.

"God of Jacob!" Zerchi breathed, an angry flush of blood creeping into his face. "God even of *Cain!* What are they doing this time? And to whom, and for what? Gentle Christ, let it be only—" He choked off. His glance whirled once around the room as if in search of prey, and alighted briefly on the scribe.

"Now, Father—" Sensing the imminence of the thunderbolt, the monk began backing away.

"*YA!*" Zerchi made as if to lunge across the desk at him, causing the scribe to knock over a map case, trip on it, and crash down on his meaty rump in the doorway.

Somewhat mollified, the priest shifted his gaze to an old woodcarving of Saint Edward Leibowitz which stood in one corner of the study. "Holy Edward!" he barked. "They've gone and dropped Lucifer! After all you did the last time, they've gone and done it anyhow!" His countenance took on chameleon hues as he sat suppressing wrath. The abbot rarely barked at the saints, especially rarely at the saint who had founded his order. His exasperation had crossed a threshold, and he knew it was in bad taste. Essentially, it was intended as a prayer. Later he would remember to apologize for the tone of it. "Well," he muttered at last, "sorry, Pat. Let's send a wire, then. I'll call later, but I want an answer on paper too. Drive it into Sanly Bowitts, have them wire it, get it repeated back."

"Uh, you didn't give me the message yet, Father," the monk hazarded.

Zerchi glowered at the desktop. "As follows, then. '*Please wire confirmation or cancellation of provisional plans regarding . . .*' capital *D* . . . '*Dismissal of . . .*' capital *S* . . . '*Servants, and if confirmed, please instruct as to date of dismissal.*' There. Now read it back."

"*Please wire confirmation or cancellation of provisional plans regarding Dismissal of Servants and if confirmed please instruct as to date of dismissal.*"

"Good. Do you know what it means?"

"No, Father."

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"Good again. Don't try to find out. And don't discuss it—or even mention it—to anybody. Oh yes, and send the wire '*Addressee Only*' and '*Top Urgent.*' I want to make certain His Eminence signs for it himself and gets it tonight.

"Oh, and Pat," he called as the secretary started to leave. "Better hurry back. Sanly Bowitts has a breeder plant. We're in a secondary target area."

The monk vanished, only to reappear briefly. "Brother Joshua's here, Father."

"Send him in. Ho, Josh, shut the door and turn on the silencer. Did you get your cronies in Spokane?"

"I talked to Lenui, Father. He said—"

"Silencer first," Zerchi interrupted. "I've got something to tell you that I don't want overheard."

Joshua closed the door and flipped a wall switch next to the lighting, bringing a squeal of protest from concealed loudspeakers. When the squeal stopped, the room acoustics were suddenly changed. Sounds from the vicinity of the desk were outphased, and the reinforced side-waves were channeled into wall baffles to be dissipated. There was a sudden illusion of deafness. The abbot cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted.

"Testing!"

Standing at the door, the monk heard the shout as a distant echo. He nodded. Zerchi waved him toward a chair. Still, it was necessary to speak loudly across the desk in order to be heard.

"Do your bathing in the showers after this!"

"Yes, Father."

"Mortify yourself for offending sister's modesty. I'm aware you haven't got any. Listen, I guess you can't even walk past the reservoir—without jumping in baby-spanking-bald for a swim, eh?"

Joshua stiffened. "Where did you hear that I—I mean—I only waded—"

The abbot ignored his sudden alarm. "Tell me about Lenui? Did they detect the shot in Spokane?"

"They picked it up before we did, Father. We traded readings. We couldn't triangulate it accurately, but the trade helped some. It wasn't in this hemisphere. It was most likely in Asia. That's as close as we could pin it down."

"Was it a test shot, or wasn't it?"

"That's something the measurements won't tell, Father."

"Of course not," the priest fumed. "Beta particles don't wear bloodstains. All right, so it was in Asia, and so we don't know yet. Joshua, get ready to take a trip. Be ready by dawn. I don't know that you're going, but be ready anyhow."

Joshua nodded slowly, his eyes wandering over the desktop as if

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searching for clues. Zerchi watched him and smiled wryly.

"That's a very suspicious look you put on when you hear something like that," said the abbot. "If you're trying to look blank and meek, I'll tell you, it doesn't turn out that way. It just makes you look like a suspicious tomcat. If you want to look blank, better practice with a mirror first." He chuckled at Joshua's consternation. "Now don't try the innocence mask. That just makes it worse. What do you want to know?"

"The trip," Joshua said weakly. "Where to?"

"New Rome." The abbot studied him for effect. "That's better," he counseled. "Just gawk when you feel like it. It looks stupid, a bit, but honest."

"New Rome?"

"*If*. There's an *if*. Several of them, maybe. I'd rather wait until the *ifs* are resolved before I tell you about this. Then maybe I wouldn't have to tell you at all. But there's not much time. I have to start telling you now. That's why I had you turn on the silencer. Now turn on your own silencer, son. You're to repeat nothing you hear. If things turn out so that you don't make the trip, you're to forget what you hear. Is that plain?"

"Certainly, Father."

"Does the phrase '*Dismissal of the Servants*' mean anything to you?"

"The *Nunc Dimittis* . . . ?"

"Not that. Never mind. Now, say the first thing that occurs to you when I give you a word."

"The word?"

"Space."

"Hard, sweaty work." The monk laughed. "That's an easy one. What next?"

"No next. Just 'space.' Hard sweaty work, you say. You *know*, don't you?"

"I was with the Close Space Assault Team, Father. Then for a while on the shuttle. After that, I put in a hitch at the moon station."

"No time with the starships?"

"No, Father. I was training for it, but then Nancy got sick, and—" He broke off and sat looking gloomy.

"And after Nancy died, you quit space and went to the Benedictines."

The monk looked up curiously and nodded.

"And then you and your counselor talked it over for a few months—and decided your vocation was with the Albertians rather than the Benedictines."

"That's right, Father."

"And while you've been with us, you've been wrestling with whether you've got a call to the priesthood, or whether you're going to stick with the observatory."

"It's all been pretty jumbled, all right, Father," Joshua admitted. "I spent most of my life so far wandering around in all directions.

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Only now, I really thought—"

"Thought you had it straightened out?"

"Except about the priesthood."

"Well, maybe you'll be glad to hear that it's been straight all along. That it all adds up to a very clear design. That you weren't wandering without purpose. That you haven't wasted any time."

"I don't understand."

"A clear design, nicely blueprinted, Joshua. It's over there in my wall safe. It's a blueprint of you, past and future. Of course, it doesn't have to apply. That's up to events, and it's also up to you. There exists a plan called Dismissal of the Servants. You were picked to have a part in it while you were still with the Benedictines. I won't say you've been steered. You haven't. You've been offered certain choices from time to time, and you made all the right decisions. We just made sure that the proper choices were put to you. Monastic obedience is all very well, but we wanted to make sure—sure that when the time came, you'd not only do it, but want to do it. The time's now, maybe. You want it softly, or you want it bluntly?"

"Bluntly, I think."

"Dismissal of the Servants is a plan to evacuate the Holy See in the event of total thermonuclear war." He paused. "There! Now you've managed to look really blank."

"Evacuate . . . where to?"

"Off Earth."

"The Centaurus colony? Or Beta—"

"Right the first time."

"His Holiness is going—?"

"What? Who, the present Pope? No, no! The present Pope abandon—no, I think not, Joshua. I think not. A certain cardinal—never mind who—is being sent. The Centaurus colony will become his diocese. If the worst happens on Earth, the cardinal will rule as Supreme Pontiff."

"From Alpha Centauri? But what is it that you want me to do, Father?"

"Did you ever wonder, Josh, why so many ex-spacers wind up with the Albertians? Right now, we have thirty-three monks with space experience. Astrogators, computermen, macroquantum mathematicians, Berkstrun drive mechanics, and so on. During the last fifty years, we've never had less than twenty. We've made quite a bit of money on some of their textbooks, as a matter of fact. Does this suggest anything?"

"Well, there's a wisecrack about 'when they graduate from Heaven, they—' "

"Don't, please, I beg you!"

"All right, I guess it would suggest something, Father, if we owned a starship."

"We do."

"What? Where?"

The priest chuckled. "That

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made you sit up, did it? I don't know where. Only half a dozen people know where it is. But we have the ship. We've had it for fifty years. Dismissal of the Servants was born that long ago. During the last war threat. That war didn't happen. So they held the plan in abeyance. As far as I know, it's still that way. We have the ship. They've made certain we kept the makings of a crew. The physical task of moving the Holy See and the records of the Church is given to us. I'm waiting for them to confirm or cancel. If they confirm, you and about twenty of our other ex-spacers are going up." He thumbed at the ceiling. "Way up. For good."

Joshua, who was sitting with his eyes closed and breathing deeply, snapped them open again. "For good?"

"I'll tell you more later. It's time for supper. You'll have to tell them about Lucifer, if they haven't already heard. Let's go."

III

The old abbey was unchanged, but had overflowed its ancient walls. To protect the ancient stone buildings against encroachment by a more impatient architecture, convenience had been compromised at times, and it was necessary to cross the highway to reach the new refectory, for the old one was condemned, its roof buckling in. The inconvenience of the arrangement was somewhat mitigated by the culvert tunnel through which the monks marched twice daily to their meals.

The highway was the same road the pagan armies had used, centuries old, flowing or trickling according to times and season with a traffic of pilgrims, peasants with donkey carts, nomads, wild horsemen out of the east, artillery, tanks, ten-ton trucks. Once, long before, there had been six lanes and robot traffic. Then the traffic stopped, the pavement cracked, and sparse grass grew in the cracks after an occasional rain. And the dust had covered it, and the desert wanderers had dug up its broken concrete to build hovels and barricades. The road became a desert trail, crossing wilderness. Now there were six lanes and robot traffic, as before.

"Traffic's light tonight," the abbot observed as they left the main gate. "Let's hike across. That tunnel gets suffocating in a dust storm. Or do you feel like dodging buses?"

"Let's go."

Low-slung trucks without headlights sped mindlessly past them with whining tires and moaning turbines. With dish antennae they watched the road, and with magnetic feelers they felt at the guiding strips of steel in the road and were given guidance thereby, as they rushed along the pink fluorescing river of oiled concrete like

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corpuscles in an artery of Man. The behemoths charged heedlessly past the two monks that dodged them from lane to lane: to be felled by one of them was to be run over by truck after truck until a safety cruiser found the flattened imprint of a man and stopped to clean it up.

"This was a mistake," Joshua grunted as they reached the center island and paused for breath.

"Well, if you feel the jig's up, son," Zerchi said wryly, "confess, and I'll shrive you now, before we broach the westbound lanes."

"Put your stole away," chuckled Joshua. "We'll nimble-leg it past the trucks, all right, but not past what waits on the other side. See for yourself, it's Mrs. Grales. Still standing by the gate."

The abbot clapped his forehead. "Holy Martyrs and Innocents! I clean forgot. It's her night to prowl me down. She's sold her tomatoes to the nun's refectory, and now she's after me again."

"After you? She was there when I crossed before, nearly an hour ago. What does she want?"

"You'll see. She haggles like a skinflint with the sisters. They pay the best part of her price because they feel sorry for her. She gyps them, and then gives the overcharge to me to put in the poor-box. It's gotten to be a little ritual. The little ritual, I don't mind. It's what comes afterwards. You'll see."

"Shall we go back?"

"And hurt her feelings? No, come on."

They plunged into the thin stream of trucks again. The two-headed woman and her six-legged dog waited with an empty vegetable basket by the gate, and the woman was crooning softly to the dog. Four of the dog's legs were healthy legs, but the extra pair dangled uselessly at its sides. As for the woman, one head was as useless as the extra legs of the dog. It was a small head, a cherubic head, but it never opened its eyes. It gave no evidence of sharing in her breathing or her understanding. It lolled uselessly on one shoulder, blind, deaf, mute, and only vegetatively alive. Perhaps it lacked a brain, for it showed never a sign of independent consciousness or personality. The neighboring farmers said that a surgeon once offered to remove it. They said Mrs. Grales had adamantly refused. Her other face had aged, grown decrepit, but the superfluous head retained the features of infancy, although it was toughened by the gritty wind, darkened by the desert sun.

The old woman curtsied at their approach, and her dog drew back with a snarl. "Evenin', Father Zerchi," she drawled, "a most pleasant evenin' to ye, and ye, Brother."

"Why, hello, Mrs. Grales—"

The dog burst into a frenzy, barking and bristling and dancing

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in as if for a lunge at the abbot's ankles. Mrs. Grales promptly batted it from behind with the vegetable basket. The dog's teeth slashed the basket, and the animal turned on its mistress with indiscriminate rage. She fended it off with the basket, and after a few resounding whacks, it retired to sit growling in the gateway, thus cutting off the monks from immediate escape.

"What a fine mood Priscilla's in," Zerchi observed pleasantly. "Is she going to have pups?"

"Beg shriv'ness, yer honors," said Mrs. Grales, "it's not the pup's motherful condition as makes her so, devil fret her, but 'tis 'at man of mine. He's witched the piteous pup, he has, for love of witchin', and it makes her feared of all. I beg your honors' shriv'ness for her naughties."

"It's all right. Good night, Mrs. Grales."

But escape was not so easy. She caught at his sleeve and smiled her toothlessly irresistable smile.

"A minute, Father, only a minute for the old tumater woman, if ye have it to spare."

"Why, of course. I'd be glad—"

Joshua gave the abbot a sidelong grin and went over to negotiate with the dog. He approached her slowly, tried whimpering doglike peace offers through his nose. Priscilla stopped growling and eyed him with plain contempt.

"Here, Father, here," Mrs. Grales was saying. "Take a little something for your box. Here—" There was a rattle of coins, and a murmur of protest from Zerchi. "No, here, take of it, take of it. Oh, I know as how ye always say, by fret, but I be not so poor's ye might think on me. And ye do good work. If ye don't take of it, that no good man of mine'll have it from me, and do him the devil's work. Here—I sold my tumaters, and I got my price near, and I bought my feed for the week and even a play-pretty for Rachel. I want ye to have of it. Here."

"It's very kind . . ."

After the tentative peace offer, Joshua turned his back on the dog and waited. Soon he heard her get up and inch toward him, sniffing warily. The monk growled a warning growl low in his throat. Priscilla stopped, canine superstitions aroused. The monk waited until she took one more step, then whirled to growl a battle growl. The results would have made a mastiff proud. Priscilla fled yelping into the shadows.

"We can get by," he said to Zerchi. "Priscilla believes in werewolves."

"Very convincing," the priest grunted. "How do you do it?"

"The growl? It takes a long rattly epiglottus, that's all."

"Disgusting! But preserve it. You'll have better use for it someday."

"How?"

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"I'll tell you later."

"Only a minute more of ye, Father," the woman said, catching at his sleeve again as he started away. "Only a minute more I'll keep ye, and no longer. It's little Rachel I wanted to see ye about. There's the baptism and the christenin' to be thought of, and I wished to ask ye if ye'd do the honor of—"

"Mrs. Grales," he put in gently, "go to your parish priest. He should handle these matters, not I. I have no parish, but only the abbey. See Father Selo at Saint Michael's. Our chapel hasn't even a font. Besides, women aren't permitted—"

"The nun's chapel has a font, and women can—"

"It's for Father Selo, not me."

"Ay, ay, that I know, but I saw Father Selo, and I brought Rachel to his church, and the fool of a man would not touch her!"

"He refused to baptize Rachel?"

"That he did, the fool of a fool of—"

"It's a priest you're talking of, Mrs. Grales. And no fool, for I know him well. And he must have had his reasons. If you don't agree with his reasons, then see someone else—but not a monastic priest. Talk to the pastor at Saint Augustine's, maybe."

"Ay, and that too have I done. And he refused as well, the fool of a man."

"Then why not appeal to the bishop, if you're not convinced. The diocesan palace is at—"

"Done! Done! And after hizz-excell'ncy, I went to see . . ."

Mrs. Grales launched into a prolonged account of her skirmishings in behalf of the unbaptized Rachel. She had assaulted the hierarchy at all levels that looked vulnerable, won no battles, but had established a promising, so she imagined, bridgehead at the Vatican. Joshua came over to listen. As he watched her, the monk suddenly took the abbot's arm just above the elbow. He continued to stare at Mrs. Grales, and his fingers gradually tightened on the priest's arm until Zerchi winced, muttered in pain, and pulled at the monk's wrist with his free hand.

"What were you doing?" he hissed irritably, then noticed Joshua's expression. The monk's eyes had locked on the old woman as if caught by the glance of a cockatrice. The abbot looked at her quickly, but saw nothing strange, nothing but an extra head, at least, and that Joshua had seen times enough.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Grales," Zerchi cut in as soon as she fell short of breath. "I have to go. I'll call Father Selo for you, but that's all I can do. I'll see you again, I'm sure."

"Thank ye kindly, and beg shriv'ness for keeping ye."

"Good night, Mrs. Grales."

They entered the gate and hiked toward the refectory. Joshua

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thumped the heel of his hand against his temple several times, as if to jar something loose.

"Why were you staring at her like that?" the abbot demanded crossly. "I thought it very rude."

"You didn't notice, Father?"

"Notice what?"

"You *didn't* notice. Well, I imagined it then. Let it pass. But who is Rachel? Why won't they baptize the child? Is she the woman's daughter?"

The abbot smiled without humor. " 'Rachel' is the name given by Mrs. Grales to that oddity on her shoulder."

"Her other head!"

"Don't shout so. She'll hear you yet."

"And she wants it *baptized?*"

"Most urgently, I'd say. It's gotten to be an obsession."

Joshua waved his arms. "How do they settle such things?"

"I don't know, and I don't want to know, and I'm grateful to Heaven it's not up to me to figure out. How many souls has a lady with an extra head? It's things like that, son, that cause ulcers higher up. Beware. Now why were you staring at her, and pinching my arm off like that?"

The monk was slow to answer. "It smiled," he said at last.

"What smiled?"

"Rachel. She smiled at me. I thought she was going to wake up." He said it very earnestly. "She smiled."

The abbot stopped him at the refectory entrance and peered at him curiously.

"You imagined it," he accused.

"I imagined it."

"Then *look* like you imagined it."

Joshua tried. "I can't."

"Let's go inside."

She had a big family, did the two-headed woman. Her genes were well scattered over the earth, genes shattered and twisted by the seed of Lucifer during the last Deluge of Flame eighteen centuries ago. The genes kept cropping up in even the most respectable of blood lines. Her own ancestors had been of sound stock, it had been thought; among them were the hereditary mayors of Sanly Bowitts. But somewhere two streams had mingled. Lucifer and dead kings had played a monstrous joke on Mrs. Grales and on her mate. Her mate. The abbot had winced at her mention of that "man" of hers, although Zerchi was seldom susceptible to nightmares.

The abbot dropped her coins into the collection box as they entered. She'd be back for them, come winter, when her vines withered and there were few calls for her services as midwife. The poor folk who still supported midwifery could not pay her well, and in the winter their wives left off bearing, as if Nature, to whom such people were always close, sought to pro-

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tect them from hardship by imposing a seasonal reproductive cycle, as in lesser orders of life than Man. After October, unless there were truth in the ugly gossip that called her abortionist as well as midwife, she'd not earn enough to keep herself in food and her mate in canvas straps, and she'd be back for her coins of Summer.

The new refectory was functional, chromium befixtured, acoustically tailored, and germicidally illuminated. Gone were the smoke-blackened stones, the tallow lamps, the wooden bowls and cellar-ripened cheeses. Except for the cruciform seating arrangement and the ranks of images along the walls, it would be easy to mistake the place for a company lunch room or a collegiate union. The atmosphere had changed. But then the atmosphere of the abbey as a whole had changed. Once the Order had strived to save remnants of a mighty civilization through dreary ages, but now a new and mightier civilization was risen; the old jobs had been done and new ones found. The past was venerated, and exhibited in glass cases, but it was not the present. The Order conformed to the times, to a behemoth present of uranium and steel and flaring rocketry, of the growl of heavy industry and the high thin whine of star drive converters. At least, it had conformed in superficial ways.

"*Accedite ad eum . . .*"

The reader intoned the Blessing of Texts, versicles of thankfulness for the gift of sight and the light of literacy. During the reading of the announcements, the robed legions seemed restless at their places, as if the Organism, the Order, whose cells were men, whose life had flowed through seventy generations, sensed a note amiss tonight, sensed an ultraperceptible tension tonight, sensed, through the connaturality of its membership, the knowledge known but to a few. The Organism lived as a body, worshiped as a body, worked as a body, and, at times, seemed dimly conscious as a mind—infusing its members, whispering to itself and to Another in the *Lingua Prima,* baby tongue of the species. Or perhaps it was only the distant noises that had begun drifting across the desert while the monks were assembling for the evening meal, only the repeated snort-growl of the ground-to-space missiles that caused the restlessness in the hall tonight. It came from the practice range ten miles to the south, and occurred whenever the Earth-satellite target objects crossed the heavens at a range favorable for target practice. The ZDI was shooting off a lot of them tonight.

"Lucifer is fallen," announced Brother Joshua, who had been summoned to the lectern to tell what he knew. He told it tersely. The robed legion sat delaying its

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emotions, as if unable to react at all to the stupefying news. There was a numb hush. "Lucifer was dropped somewhere," he repeated bleakly. "It's all I know." He shook his head and went to sit down.

The abbot tried to bring a note of reassurance into his voice as he followed Joshua at the lectern.

"The Regency Council of the Atlantic Confederacy has said nothing," he told them. "The dynasty has issued no pronouncements. This *could* mean that they know nothing about it. We don't know yet whether there's war, or only a test shot or threat shot. Either way, some nation has broken the Compact. The Zone Defense Interior people seem to be moving fast, but that doesn't necessarily mean a war is on.

"Let's remind ourselves that Lucifer has been with us—this time—for nearly two centuries. And was dropped only twice, in sizes smaller than megaton. We all know what *could* happen, if it's war. The genetic festering is still with us—from the last time Man tried to eradicate himself. Back then, centuries ago, maybe they didn't know what would happen. Or maybe they knew, but just didn't believe it because they hadn't seen it yet. They hadn't seen a billion corpses. They hadn't seen the stillborn, the monstrous, the scaly, the dehumanized, the blind. They hadn't seen the madness and the murder and the blotting out of reason. Then they did it. Then they saw it.

"Now. Now the princes, the presidents, the praesidiums—now they know. With dead certainty. They can know it by the children they beget and send to the asylums for the deformed. They know it, and they've kept the peace. Not Christ's Peace, but peace—for two centuries, with only two abortive exceptions. Now they have the bitter certainty. Brothers, they *can't* do it again. Only a race of madmen could do it again. . . ."

He stopped. Someone was smiling. It was only a small smile, but in the midst of a sea of grave faces it stood out like a dead fly in a bowl of cream. Zerchi frowned. The old man kept on smirking. He sat at the "beggars' table" with three other transient tramps. An old fellow with a brushy beard, stained yellow about the chin. He wore as a jacket a burlap bag with armholes, and he fanned his soup with a basket hat. He continued to smile at the speaker. He was old as a rain-worn crag, and he would have made a good beggar for a Maundy laving. He looked like he was about to stand up and make an announcement to his hosts —or blow a ramshorn at them, perhaps?—but that was only an illusion caused by the smile. Zerchi dismissed the feeling that he had seen the old man before, somewhere. He concluded quickly.

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"This evening we will begin a novena in the chapel. For peace. Let us do penance." He started to leave, then looked back. "*Orate, fratres,*" he added gravely.

On the way out, the old beggar nodded at him. Zerchi paused.

"Who are you? Have I seen you before?"

"Call me Lazarus," said the old one, and chuckled.

Joshua slept badly that night. In a dream he met Mrs. Grales again, and there was a surgeon who sharpened a knife, saying, "This deformity must be removed before it becomes malignant." And the Rachel face opened its eyes and tried to speak but could make no sound. The monk read its lips, and he tried to get through the wall of glass to save her, for she was saying: "I am the Immaculate Conception," but he failed to reach her, and there was a great deal of blood afterwards.

It was a troubled night, a night that belonged to Lucifer.

It was the night a city died.

IV

"*This is your Emergency Warning Network,*" the radio announcer was saying when Joshua came into the abbot's study at four o'clock on the morning of the same night, "*bringing you the latest bulletin on the pattern of fallout from the enemy bombing of Texarkana.*"

"You sent for me . . . ?"

Zerchi waved him to silence and to a seat. The priest's face looked drawn and bloodless, a steel-gray mask of icy self-control. He had aged and shrunk in size since nightfall, it seemed to Joshua. They listened hypnotically to the voice from the set.

"*But first, an announcement just released by the Supreme Command. The royal family is safe. I repeat: the royal family is known to be safe. And the announcement goes on to state that the Regency Council was evacuated before the Enemy strike destroyed our capital city. No civil disorders have been reported outside the disaster area. A cease-fire decree was issued immediately by the Court of Nations, with a suspended death sentence applied to the rulers of both nations if the decree is disobeyed. Both governments have promised to honor the cease-fire for ten days while the foreign ministers meet on Guam.*"

"Ten days," Zerchi grunted. "Doesn't give us enough time."

"*. . . however, there has been no retraction of the Asian ultimatum. The Asian radio insists that the attack on our capital was retaliatory, and in response to an Atlantic Confederacy attack on a city of eighty thousand in the province of Itu Wan, an attack which our Supreme Command denies had occurred. Neutral observers have reported a thermonuclear detonation*

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of Lucifer's proportions in the vicinity of Itu Wan, but our government has issued a hotly worded denial . . ."

"That was the one we detected," Joshua muttered.

"*. . . pointing out that the city supposedly destroyed was of no military significance. The recent political unrest in Itu Wan has caused some observers to suggest that the Asian rulers chose to use wholesale liquidation of their own subjects as a way to stir up—*"

Zerchi snapped off the set. "Where's the truth?" he hissed. "What's to be believed? Or does it matter at all! When mass murder's been answered with mass murder, rape with rape, hate with hate, there's no longer much meaning in asking whose ax is the bloodier. Evil piled on evil piled on evil. I feel like saying words I've never even heard. Toad's dung. Hag pus. Gangrene of the soul. Immortal brain-rot. Do you understand me, Joshua? And Christ breathed the same carrion air with them! They foul the wind by breathing it, more than they foul it with their poisoned fallout." He turned away from the desk and spat. He got up to pace awhile, and gradually recaptured some of his cold reserve. "But who do I mean by they, they, *they?*" he muttered. "Their mass murder, their rape, their hate. It's mine too, isn't it?"

The monk murmured something incoherent.

"Mine," said Zerchi, "Adam's, Herod's, Judas's, Hannegan's, mine. Not only mine, but everybody's." He stalked over to the corner where the woodcarving of Saint Leibowitz stood watch over the room. The statue was old, very old. Some former ruler of the abbey had shipped it down to the basement to stand in dust and gloom while a dry rot etched the surface grain of the wood, eating away the Spring grain and leaving the Summer grain so that the face seemed deeply lined. The saint wore a faintly satiric smile. Zerchi had rescued it from oblivion and termites mostly because of the smile. He fingered the mound of faggots whereon the martyr's feet were planted, and lightly touched the hangman's rope. "And that's the way we get rid of it, eh?" he said in a half-whisper. "The only way. *Per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso.* Because there is no Redemption for the flesh, but only through the flesh, His Flesh, for the soul." He stood there a little while with the woodcarving. "So be it," he muttered at last, and went back to the desk. He found an envelope amid the heaped papers and tossed it to Joshua. "Here. A wire from New Rome. Read it."

The monk eyed the message, frowned curiously. "'*Shake the dust off your sandals and go preach Sodom to Gomorrha.*' That's confirmation, Father?"

"That's confirmation. I talked

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to him long distance just a little while before I sent Pat to wake you. His Eminence isn't really a cynic, Joshua. Just tired."

"I'm leaving, then?"

"Unless you refuse."

"I'll go, of course. And the others?"

"Twenty-five of our ex-spacers, six sisters and about twenty children from the Saint Joseph school, plus the cardinal and his staff—that's all we can get aboard. A plane's been chartered to fly you to New Rome. You'll leave this morning."

The abbot went to the wall safe and brought back a thick portfolio. He handed it to Joshua. "This is a digest of Dismissal of the Servants. The detailed plans are at the Vatican. Study the digest en route. They'll brief you thoroughly when you get there—as thoroughly as time permits. Now, son, answer me the thorny question. Are you ready to get nailed up on it?"

"I don't understand."

"Why do you think I'm talking to you alone, instead of you and twenty-five others?"

"It hadn't occurred to me at all; I've been too dizzy to wonder. Why are you?"

"Because you're the one who's getting nailed up on it, if you'll submit. No, more than submit—go meet it. Have you, or haven't you, a vocation to the priesthood? There's your inquisition, and the time's now, and a brief now it is too. Would you like half an hour? Would you like a glass of water? You go so gray. I tell you, Joshua, if you're to be abbot, you'll have to control your reactions better than you do. You'll have to be able to, at least. I don't, I know, but I can when I need to. I need not to, now. Well, can't you speak?"

"Abbot—"

"You can croak, anyway, eh? Well, do you submit to the saddle, son? Or are you broken yet? You'll be the ass He rides into Jerusalem, but it's a heavy load, and it'll break your back, because He's carrying the sins of the world."

"I don't think I'm able."

"Croak and wheeze. But you can growl too. That's well in a watchdog. But I'm mixing my metaphors. Listen, none of us has been really able. But we've tried, and we've been tried. It tries you to destruction, but you're here for that. This Order has had abbots of gold, abbots of cold tough steel, abbots of corroded lead, and none of them were able, although some were abler than others, some saints even. The gold got battered, the steel got brittle and broke, and the corroded lead got stamped into ashes by Heaven. Me, I've been lucky enough to be quicksilver; I spatter, but I run back together, somehow. I feel another spattering coming on, though, Joshua, and I think it's for keeps this time. What

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are you made of, man? What's to be tried?"

"Puppy dog tails. I'm meat, and I'm scared, Father."

"Steel screams when it's forged. It gasps when it's quenched. It creaks when it goes under load. Steel too is scared, my son. Take half an hour? A drink of water? A drink of wind? Totter off awhile. If it makes you seasick, vomit. If it makes you terrified, scream. If it makes you anything, pray. Come back by daylight, and tell me what a monk is made of. The Order is breaking apart. A part of the flock goes into space, forever. Are you its shepherd, or are you not? Go. Decide."

"There's no way out?"

"Of course. You've only to say, 'I'm not summoned to it.' That's all. Another will be appointed. But go, decide."

He went out silently into the night. He went down to the courtyard of the old abbey and sat on the curb that enclosed the rose bed. He put his chin in his hands and rolled a pebble around with his toe. Except for the light in Zerchi's window, the buildings were dark and sleeping shadows. The desert stars glittered faintly through a lingering dust haze, and there was a thin slice of cantaloupe moon in the south. A dim glow spilled into the courtyard from the open doors of the chapel, where within burned a few votary candles and the dim red eye of the sanctuary lamp, fire kindled in praise, fire kindled in worship, fire burning gently in adoration, fire in the hearts and minds of men. And there was another fire in hearts and minds, and while the first fire burned adoringly in the core of the temple, they scorched a city with the other and spilled venom over the land and left four million dead. Yet it was the same creature of fire, the same burning of the bush.

A murmur of chant came from the chapel. A small choir of monks stood watch through the night, and throughout the novena. Quiet voices, imploring Heaven for peace: *"Excita, Domine, potentiam tuam, et veni, ut salvos . . .* Stir up Thy might O Lord, and come to save us . . ." They had been there imploring when men snuffed out a city, only a few hours ago. Maybe they didn't know. Maybe nobody had told them. Brethren, the blow is struck, and the capital of the nation just now has died, and your prayers can cease. But they wouldn't cease. They'd go on while there was breath to breathe them.

Futile? If they didn't think it was futile, why send the starship? Why send it, if they believed that prayers would bring peace?

But no. They had to send it because they believed. Believed that peace was possible, if not here or now, then somewhere, sometime. If not on Earth, then someplace,

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Alpha Centauri maybe, Beta Hydri maybe, or some of the sickly straggling colonies on the planets of the suns in Scorpius. Hope sent the ship, not futility. Hope had to be, or why go at all? Shake the dust off your sandals and go preach Sodom to Gomorrha. It was a very weary and dog-tired hope that said a thing like that, but it was hope, or it wouldn't say *go*. It wasn't hope for Earth, but hope for the soul and substance of Man.

It was hope for Earth that tried to make it Eden, and despaired when it wasn't Eden. He peered up at the dusty stars of morning. There were men out there now who looked up to strange suns in stranger skies, gasped strange air, tilled strange earth—but wiped the same sweat from their brows. They were a few harassed colonies of humanity that had had small help from Earth, and now might have no help at all. No Edens, these. Less paradise than Earth. The closer men came to perfecting themselves a paradise, the more impatient they became with it, and with themselves. They made a garden of pleasure, and became progressively more miserable with it as it grew in richness and power and beauty. For then it was easier to see that something was missing in the garden, some tree or shrub that would not grow. When the world was in darkness and wretchedness, it could believe in perfection and yearn for it. But when the world came bright with reason and riches, it could no longer believe, for it saw the narrowness of the needle's eye, and rankled. So they were going to tear it up again, were they, this garden, and hope again in wretched darkness? If anything lived to have hope, if anything could. If anything human. If anything like Mrs. Grales, perhaps.

Why do I have to go, Lord? he wondered. Do I have to? What am I trying to decide? To go? Refuse to go? But that's been decided, hasn't it. There was a summons, long ago, and I answered that one, didn't I, and pledged a vow, and that leaves no question at all about going.

But anoint me priest, call me abbas, set watch over the souls of men? Must they insist on that?

But they don't insist. They're just in an awful hurry. They're sure of me, are they? To drop it on me like that, they'd have to be sure of me. More than I am of myself.

Well, destiny, speak up! But destiny's decades away, always *seems* decades away, and this is right now. Could destiny always be right now, maybe, this very instant, maybe?

Maybe it's enough that *they're* sure of me.

No, not enough, not nearly enough. He had to be sure, somehow sure. In half an hour. Please, Lord, it's only one of the

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vipers, one of the adulterous generation, begging for a sign, a sign, a sign. . . .

He started suddenly. Something was slithering quietly in the dry leaves under the rose bushes behind him. Signs didn't slither, did they? Only a cricket, maybe, and not slithering, rustling.

No, it slithered all right. Appropriate sign if it slithered out and stung him in the backside?

The sound continued, a slow dragging in the leaves. Couldn't possibly be a cricket, he decided. Brother Hegan had killed a sidewinder in the courtyard once.

The sound began to make him nervous. After all, perhaps a sign wasn't really so necessary. The curb was very low, and it might easily sting him in the kidney. . . .

"*Dicit Dominus Petro,*" the monks in the chapel were murmuring. "And the Lord saith to Peter: when thou wast younger, thou didst gird thyself . . ."

The sound slithered closer still. No, a sign was not essential at all. He felt, or imagined he felt, something brush his wrist. He shot up with a small yelp and leaped away. He seized a loose rock and threw it into the bushes. The crash that resulted was louder than he'd anticipated. He felt slightly foolish. Ask for an omen, then stone it. Oh, well.

Nothing emerged from the bushes, not even a sound. He tried tossing a pebble, but it too proved offensively noisy in the quiet night. He waited awhile, but nothing stirred in the bushes.

Dawn was beginning to lick the stars off the sky with a pink tongue. Soon he would have to go tell Zerchi. Tell him what? He rubbed the gnats out of his beard and started toward the chapel.

"*Unus panis, et unum corpus multi sumus,*" came the voice from the chapel, "*omnes qui de uno . . .* One bread and one body, though many, are we, and of one bread and one chalice have partaken . . ."

He stopped in the doorway to look back toward the rose bushes. It was a trap, wasn't it? he thought. You'd send it, knowing I'd throw stones at it, wouldn't You? He went on inside after a moment. A dozen monks knelt in choir. His voice joined theirs in the entreaty, and for a time he ceased to think at all. But when he arose again, certainty had come to him.

It was to be so, then. It was to be so.

"And what is he made of?" Zerchi asked pleasantly when he was back.

"Puppy dog tails," said Joshua, "but if you want it that way—" He spread his hands. "All right."

"Only 'all right'?"

"It's hard to say."

"Don't say it. You went out in a panic, you came back calm. That says it. Let's go rouse the others."

There was little time. After the

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party was assembled, the abbot spoke to them quietly of the history and the continuity of the Order and of the tasks that lay ahead. The Visitationist Friars of the Order of Saint Leibowitz of Tycho were to be an independent offshoot of the Albertian Order. After the first mission, that of evacuating the Holy See to a colony world, the monks were to form the nucleus of a spacegoing Order. "The ship will be your abbey," he told them. "Wherever Man goes, you will go. And with you will go the records and remembrances of four thousand years. You will be mendicants and wanderers. To the peoples and the cultures that grow out of the present colony groups, give the chronicles of Earth and the canticles of the Crucified, for many will have forgotten. Take their young men and train them in our ways and pass into their hands the continuity of the Order, that the ship may go on. Remember Earth. Never forget her, but never come back, lest you meet the archangel with a sword of flame guarding her passes. Space is your home hereafter, and it is a lonelier desert than here. Keep vigil, brethren. Pray."

They came to him one at a time to be embraced and blessed, and then they knelt to be blessed as a congregation. Afterwards, they filed into the jet airliner, and the first short lap of the long journey was begun. The abbot watched until the plane vanished in the morning sky. Then he drove back to the abbey and to his own. Theirs would be the easier way than Joshua's. They had only to stand watch for the end, and pray that it would not come.

V

"The area of fallout continues stationary," said the announcer, *"and the danger of further windspread has nearly vanished. In case of high winds over the region to the northwest of what was, ten days ago, the city of Texarkana, some additional green territory may be reclassified as zone yellow, but not as red. As you can see by the pattern on your screen, zone red has continued to decrease in length and breadth since yesterday. By day after tomorrow, zone red will have vanished entirely, allowing relief workers to penetrate the worst disaster areas. . . ."*

"At least nothing new has happened," remarked the abbot's visitor. "You've been safe from it here. It looks like you'll continue safe."

"Will we, now?" Zerchi grunted. "But let's listen a moment."

"The latest death toll estimate, on this ninth day after the destruction of the capital, gives three million, eight hundred thousand dead. The bulk of this number comes from the city itself. The toll will mount in the months to come, because of the delayed effects of

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radiation poisoning. Victims who have been exposed to radiation far in excess of the critical dosage are advised to report to your nearest Green Star Relief Station. Voluntary euthanasia is available for hopeless cases, but only under procedures defined by law. Sufferers are to be warned against unauthorized suicide, which may jeopardize their heirs' claims to insurance and other relief benefits under Public Law 10-WR-3E. Well-meaning citizens who assist any radiation victim in putting an end to his own life may be prosecuted for homicide. Euthanasia must be handled by due process of law. Apply to your nearest Green Star—"

Zerchi turned off the set so savagely the dial knob tore loose in his hand. He whirled out of his chair and went to stand at the window, looking out on the courtyard where a crowd of refugees milled around some hastily built wooden tables. The sign outside the gate was down, for there were women and children to be fed, clothed, and given shelter. The abbey, old and new, was overrun with them, people of all ages and stations whose homes had been in the blighted regions.

He watched two monks carry a steaming cauldron out of the emergency kitchen. They hoisted it onto a table and began ladling out soup.

The abbot's visitor cleared his throat and coughed uncomfortably. The abbot turned.

"Due process," they call it," he growled. "Due process of state-sponsored suicide! When the mass murder stops, the self murder begins. With all of society's blessings."

"Well," said his visitor, "it's certainly better than letting them die horribly by degrees."

"Is it?" Zerchi snapped. "Why, if the soul dies horribly anyhow?"

The visitor shrugged, and said not unpleasantly: "I've never thought that I have a soul. I'm fairly sure I don't. If *you* have one, however, then you're right to think as you do. For yourself. Then, there's nothing to argue about."

Zerchi smiled thinly. "You're right. You don't *have* a soul. Neither do I. I *am* a soul. I *have* a body, to drag around for awhile."

"A linguistic confusion—"

"You're right again. A linguistic confusion. But whose confusion is it, Doctor? Mine or yours. Are you so very sure?"

The visitor laughed uneasily. "Let's not quarrel, Father. I'm not with the Mercy Cadre. I work on the exposure survey team. We don't kill anybody."

Zerchi gazed at him in silence for a moment. The visitor was a short muscular man with a pleasant round face and a balding pate that was sunburned and freckled. He wore a green serge uniform, and a cap with the Green Star Insignia lay in his lap.

Why quarrel, indeed? The man

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was a medical worker, not a euthanast. The Green Star accomplished some admirable relief work, some of it heroic. That it also did some excessively evil work was Zerchi's own belief and the belief of those who shared his Faith. The bulk of society did not agree that it was evil. Even believing society was dead wrong, the priest could not condemn the good work with the evil. The medic had tried to be friendly. His request seemed simple enough. And he had been neither demanding nor officious about it.

"The work you want to do here —will it take long?"

The worker shook his head. "Two days at most, I think. We have two mobile units. We can bring them into your courtyard, hitch the two trailers together and start right in. We'll take the obvious radiation cases, and the wounded ones first. We treat only the most urgent cases. Our job's clinical testing. The sick ones will get treatment at an emergency camp."

"And the sickest ones get something else at a mercy camp?"

The worker frowned. "Only if they want to go. Nobody makes them go."

"But you write out the permit that lets them go."

"I've given some red tickets, yes. I may have to this time. Here—" He fumbled in his jacket pocket and brought out a red cardboard form like a shipping label with a loop of wire for attaching it to a buttonhole or a belt loop. He tossed it on the desk. "A blank crit-dose form. There it is. Read it. It tells the man he's sick, very sick. And here—here's a green ticket, too. It tells him he's well and out of danger. Look the red one over carefully. Estimated exposure in radiation units. Blood count. Urinalysis. On one side, it's just like the green one. On the other side, the green one's blank, but look at the back of the red. The fine print. It's directly quoted from Public Law 10-WR-3E. It has to be there. The law requires it. It has to be read to him. He has to be told his rights. What he does about it is his own affair. Now, if you'd rather we parked the mobile units down the highway, we can . . ."

"You just read him this, do you? Nothing else?"

The medic paused. "It has to be explained to him, if he doesn't understand it." He paused again, gathering irritation. "Good Lord, Father, when you tell a man he's a hopeless case, what are you going to say? Read him a few paragraphs of the law, show him the door, and say 'Next!'? 'You're going to die, so good day'? *Of course* you don't read him that and nothing else, not if you have any human feeling at all!"

"I understand that. What I want to know is something else. Do you, as a physician, advise hopeless cases to go to a mercy camp?"

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"I—" The medic stopped and closed his eyes. He rested his forehead on his hand. He shuddered slightly, as if recalling something unpleasant. "Of course I do," he said finally. "If you'd seen what I've seen, you would too. Of course I do."

"You'll not do it here."

"Then we'll—" The field worker quenched an angry outburst. He stood up, started to put on his cap, then paused. He tossed the cap on the chair and walked over to the window. He looked gloomily down at the courtyard, then out at the highway. He pointed. "There's the roadside park. We can set up shop there. But it's two miles. Most of them will have to walk." He glanced at Zerchi, then looked broodingly down into the courtyard again. "Look at them. They're sick, hurt, fractured, frightened. The children too. Tired, lame, and miserable. You'd let them be herded off down the highway to sit in the dust and the sun and—"

"I don't want it that way," said the abbot. "You've only to make me one promise, and then you may use the courtyard."

"What promise?"

"Simply that you won't advise anyone to go to a mercy camp. Limit yourself to diagnosis. If you find hopeless radiation cases, tell them what the law forces you to tell them, be as consoling as you like, but don't tell them to go kill themselves."

"Listen," the field worker hissed. "They sit there and they look at you. Some scream. Some cry. Some just sit there. All of them say, 'Doctor, what can I do?' And what am I supposed to answer? Say nothing? Say, 'You can die, that's all'? What would you say?"

"I'd say, 'You can pray, child, you can pray.'"

The medic snorted. "Yes, you would, wouldn't you? Listen, *pain* is the only evil I know about, the only one I can fight—"

"Then God help you."

"Antibiotics help me more."

Zerchi framed a crisp reply, then suppressed it. "I've told you the condition. You can use the courtyard if you'll give me your word. In writing, I think." He found a blank piece of paper and a pen and laid them on the desk. "Just write *'I will not recommend euthanasia here,'* and sign it. If you don't, then they drag themselves two miles. You say I'd let them. You're right. But if they have to do it, then you'll have been no less stubborn than I."

"Of all the merciless—" He checked himself, and looked down at the blank page. "You wouldn't accept my word for it?"

"I might. What would you swear by?"

The medic bent silently over the desk and wrote. He looked at what he had written, then slashed his name under it and straightened. "All right, there's your promise.

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You think it's worth more than my word?"

"Not at all. But it's here in my pocket, and I can look at it occasionally, that's all." He patted his side. "You keep promises, Doctor Cors?"

The medic stared at him for a moment. "I'll keep it," he grunted, then turned on his heel and stalked out.

"Pat!" Zerchi called weakly. "Brother Pat, are you there?"

The secretary came to stand in the doorway. "Yes, Father?"

"You heard?"

"I heard some of it. The door was open, and I couldn't help hearing. You didn't have the silencer—"

"You heard him say it? 'Pain's the only evil I know about.' You heard that?"

The monk nodded solemnly.

"Pain is the only evil. How can any sane man look around at what's happening and *say* a thing like that? He's had pain beaten, nearly—at least the kind of pain *he* means. Is that what's wrong with the world? Just pain? Is that why they dropped Lucifer? Because somebody was *hurting?"*

"I thought I heard him say it's the only evil *he* could do anything about."

"That too. But does that make it any truer or any saner? Lame excuses. *'The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.' 'Am I my brother's . . .'* Pat, you better get out of here or I'll start raving."

"Father, I—"

"What's keeping you?— What's that, a letter? All right, give it here."

The monk handed it to him and went out. Zerchi left it unopened and glanced at the medic's pledge again. Worthless, maybe. But still, the man was sincere. And dedicated. He'd have to be dedicated to work for the kind of salaries Green Star paid. He had looked underslept and overworked. He'd probably been living on benzedrine and doughnuts since the shot that killed the city. Seeing misery everywhere and detesting it, and sincere in wanting to do something about it. Sincere . . . that was the hell of it. At a distance, your adversaries seemed fiends, but when you got a closeup, you saw the sincerity, and it was as great as your own. Perhaps Satan was the sincerest of the lot.

He opened the letter and read it. The letter informed him that Joshua and Cardinal Bretke and the others had left New Rome for an unnamed destination. The letter also advised him that information had somehow leaked out, that the ZDI and the AIA had sent men to the Vatican to ask questions about the rumored launching of an unauthorized starship. It warned him that such agents might call at the abbey, and instructed him to stall for time. He must avoid, the letter specified, answering their questions until three days after the

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date of the letter. He glanced at the date of the letter. It was mailed the day before. Evidently it meant that the ship was not in space yet.

"Let them come," Zerchi muttered, and burned the letter over the waste basket.

They'd find out about Dismissal of the Servants, but with luck and the help of Heaven, they'd find out too late. What then? he wondered.

The legal situation was tangled. The law forbade starship departures without Commission approval. Approval was hard to get and slow in coming. According to ZDI and the Commission, the Church was breaking the law. But then there was the State-Church Concordat, now a century-and-a-half old. It guaranteed the Church the right to send missions to "whatever space installations and/or planetary outposts shall have been declared by the aforesaid Commission to be ecologically non-critical and open to non-regulated enterprise," and the Concordat further asserted the Church's right to "own space vessels and travel unrestricted." The Concordat was very old. It had been signed back in the days when everyone thought that the Berkstrun drive was going to open up the universe to an unrestricted outflow of population.

It had not turned out that way at all. Companies that tried to make money by transporting colonists to extrasolar planets went quickly bankrupt. The poor couldn't foot the bill, and the wealthy didn't want to go.

When the private companies failed, the national governments had stepped in, but only briefly. The Asian rulers had sent the first ship, with a colony of their own nationals. Then the cry was heard in the West: "Are we to let the inferior races take over the stars?" And there was a brief flurry of starship launchings as colonies of black people, brown, white, and yellow people were hurled into space in the name of racism, but there was no great outflux of population, nor could there ever be. Now the starship departures were years apart, and their rate was dwindling.

Few priests had gone. Few had been invited. The Church had never taken advantage of that provision of the Concordat, and hence it had never been contested. If they hail us into court, thought Zerchi, we'll just contend that the Concordat is of greater weight than Commission rulings, and when it says "unrestricted," it means what it says. Of course, there would be a stink. They'd say that if the Church were charitable as it claimed, the ship should have carried poor colonists, hungry for land, instead of ecclesiastical dignitaries and a bunch of rascal monks. Mary and Martha again. It always came up.

But suddenly he realized the tenor of his thinking had shifted.

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A few days ago, they had all been expecting the sky to blow off and the heavens to crack open. Twice had Lucifer been hurled across the seas. But that had been nine days ago. Despite the dead, the maimed, the dying, there had been nine days of quiet. If they could hold the wrath in check for that long, perhaps it needn't happen. He found himself thinking about things that might come next week or next month, as if, after all, there could *be* a next week or a next month. And why not? He checked himself over and decided that he was hoping again.

A monk came back from the city that afternoon and reported a refugee encampment was being thrown up down at the roadside park. "Green Star's sponsoring it, I think," he added.

"Good!" said Zerchi. "We're overflowing, and I've had to turn three truckloads of them away."

The refugees were noisy in the courtyard, and the noise jangled overwrought nerves. The perpetual quiet of the old abbey was shattered by an unfamiliar din—the boisterous laughter of men telling jokes, a child crying, the rattle of pots and pans, hysterical sobbing, a Green Star medic yelling: "Hey, Raff, go fetch an enema hose." Several times the abbot suppressed an urge to go to the window and bellow down at them for silence.

At last, when he could bear no more of it, he found a pair of binoculars and went up to one of the old watchtowers where a thick stone wall cut off some of the sound from the courtyard and the wind carried it in the opposite direction. From the tower he could see the highway and the city and as far as the mesa beyond. He focused the binoculars on the mesa and watched the radar installation for a time, but nothing unusual appeared to be happening there. He lowered the glasses slightly to watch the new Green Star encampment down at the roadside park. The area had been roped off, and tents were going up. Utility crews were at work, tapping the gas and power lines. Some men were hoisting a sign at the entrance to the park, but they held it edgewise to his gaze and he could not read it. Somehow the boiling activity reminded him of a carnival coming to town. There was a big red engine of some kind; it had a firebox and what appeared to be a boiler, but he could not ascertain its purpose. And men in Green Star uniforms were erecting something that looked like a small carousel. At least a dozen trucks were lined up on the side road. Some were loaded with lumber, others with tents and collapsible cots. One seemed to be hauling firebrick, and another was burdened with pottery and straw. He studied the pottery with a slight frown gathering his forehead. There were urns or vases,

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all alike, separated by tufts of straw. They looked vaguely familiar. He had seen them somewhere before. Another truck carried nothing but a great stone statue and a pedestal of the same material. The statue was lying on its back, supported by a wooden framework and a nest of packing material. He could see only its legs and one outstretched hand that thrust up through the straw. The statue was longer than the bed of the truck, and its bare feet stuck out past the tailgate. Someone had tied a red flag to one of its great toes. *Puzzling,* thought Zerchi. What do they want with a statue?

He kept watching the men with the sign. At last one of them lowered his end of the sign to the ground and climbed a ladder to do something to the overhead hangers. The sign tilted, and Zerchi got a climpse of it. It read:

MERCY CAMP NUMBER 18
GREEN STAR
DISASTER CADRE

He looked hurriedly back at the trucks. The pottery! He recognized it now. Once he had driven past a crematorium and seen some men unloading the same sort of urns from a truck with the same company markings. He looked for the truck with the firebrick, but it had moved. At last he found it parked inside the area. It was being unloaded near the great red engine. He studied the engine again. Its boiler was not really a boiler at all, but an oven or a furnace. So!

He lowered the binoculars, muttered angrily for a moment, then hurried downstairs. He found Doctor Cors in the mobile unit in the courtyard. The medic was wiring a yellow ticket to the lapel of an old man's jacket and telling him he'd better go to a rest camp for awhile and mind the nurses, but he'd pull through if he took care of himself.

Zerchi stood with folded arms, munching the edge of his lips and coldly watching the physician. When the old man was gone, Cors looked up warily.

"Yes?" His eyes took note of the binoculars and reexamined Zerchi's face. *"Oh,"* he grunted. "Well, I have nothing to do with that end of it, nothing at all."

The abbot gazed at him for a few seconds, then turned and stalked out. He went to his office and had Brother Patrick call the highest Green Star official susceptible to being called.

"I want it moved out of our vicinity."

"I'm afraid the answer is emphatically 'no.'"

"Pat, call the workshop and get Brother Lafter up here."

"He's not there, Father."

"Then have them send a carpenter and a painter. Anybody will do."

Minutes later, two monks arrived.

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"I want five light-weight signs made at once," he told them. "I want them with good long handles. They're to be big enough to be read from a block away, but light enough for a man to carry for several hours without getting dog-tired. Can do?"

"Surely, Father. What do you want them to say?"

Zerchi wrote it out for them on a sheet of paper. "Make it big and bright," he told them. "Make it scream at the eyes. That's all."

When they were gone, he summoned Brother Patrick again. "Pat, go find me five good young healthy novices with a yearning for martyrdom. Tell them they may get what Saint Stephen got."

And I may get even worse, he thought, when New Rome hears.

The novena was ended. The abbot knelt alone in the chapel and prayed for the men who had gone to take a starship and climb the heavens into a vaster uncertainty than any faced by Man at home. They'd need much praying after. None was so susceptible as the wanderer to ills that afflict the spirit, torture belief, nag at faith, harrow the mind with doubt. At home, conscience had its overseers and its exterior taskmasters, but abroad the conscience was alone, torn between Lord and Foe. Let them be incorruptible, he prayed, let them hold true to the way of the Order.

Doctor Cors found him in the chapel at midnight and beckoned him quietly outside. The medic looked haggard and wholly unnerved.

"I just broke my promise!" he snapped challengingly.

The abbot was contemptuously silent. "Proud of it?" he asked at last.

"Not especially."

They walked toward the mobile unit and stopped in the bath of bluish light that spilled out its entrance. The medic's lab-jacket was soaked with sweat, and he dried his forehead on his sleeve. Zerchi watched him with that remote pity one might feel for the loathsome.

"We'll leave at once, of course," said Cors. "I thought I'd tell you." He turned to enter the mobile unit.

"Wait a minute," the priest grunted. "You'll tell me the rest."

"Will I?" The challenging tone again. "Why? So you can go torment the poor innocent, threaten hellfire? She's sick enough now, and so's the child. I'll tell you nothing."

"You already have. I know who you mean. So! The child too, I suppose?"

Cors hesitated. "Radiation sickness. Flash burns. The woman has a broken hip. The father's dead. The fillings in the woman's teeth are radioactive. The child almost glows in the dark. Vomiting shortly after the blast. Nausea, anemia, rotten follicles. Blind in one eye.

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The child cries constantly because of the burns. How they survived the shock wave is hard to understand. I can't do anything. Nobody can do anything for them except the Eucrem team."

"I've seen them."

"Then you know why I broke the promise. I have to *live* with myself afterwards, man! I don't want to live as the torturer of that woman and that child."

"Pleasanter to live as their murderer instead. That's how you feel, isn't it?"

"You're beyond reasonable argument."

"What did you tell her?"

"'If you love your child, spare her the agony. Go to sleep mercifully as quick as you can.' That's all. We'll leave immediately. We've finished with the radiation cases and the worst of the others. It won't hurt the rest of them to walk a couple of miles. There aren't any more critical-dosage cases."

Zerchi stalked away, then stopped and called back. "Finish," he croaked. "Finish and then get out. If I see you again, I'll—I'm afraid of what I'll do to you."

Cors spat. "I don't like being here any better than you like having me. We'll go now, thanks."

He found the woman lying on a cot with the child in the corridor of the over-crowded guest house. They huddled together under a blanket and both were crying. The building smelled of death and antiseptic. She looked up at his vague silhouette against the light.

"Father?" Her voice was frightened.

"Yes."

"We're done for. See? See what they gave me?"

He could see nothing, but he heard her fingers pick at the edge of paper. The red ticket. He could find no voice to speak to her. He came to stand over the cot. He fished in his pocket and brought out a rosary. She heard the rattle of the beads and groped for it.

"You know what it is?"

"Certainly, Father."

"Then keep it. Use it."

"Thank you."

"Bear it and pray."

"I know what I have to do."

"Don't be an accomplice. For the love of God, child, don't be an accomplice."

"The doctor said—"

She broke off. He waited for her to finish, but she stayed silent.

"Don't be an accomplice."

Still she said nothing. He gave them a blessing and left as quickly as possible. The woman had handled the beads with fingers that knew them, and there was nothing he could say to her that she didn't already know.

VI

"The conference of foreign ministers on Guam has just ended, ac-

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cording to a tersely worded communiqué issued jointly by the foreign offices. No joint policy statement has yet been issued, and it appears now that the ministers are going home without making any announcement at this time. In view of the importance of this conference, in view of the suspense with which the world awaits a fate which hangs on the results of the parley, it would appear, at least to this commentator, that the conference is not ended, but only recessed, in order that the foreign ministers may return to confer with their governments. An earlier report from unofficial sources saying that the conference was breaking up amid reciprocal denunciation and invective has been denied by the ministries. First Minister Rekol had only one statement for the press: 'I'm going back to talk to the Council of the Regency and to the Prince.' When asked if the conference would reconvene afterwards, he refused to comment, but added: 'The weather's been pleasant here; I may come back to fish.'

"The ten-day waiting period ends today, but it is generally regarded as certain that the cease-fire agreement will continue to be observed by both sides. Mutual annihilation is the only alternative. Two cities have died in a brief exchange that may or may not have been caused by abysmal blunder. It is to be remembered that neither side resorted to a saturation attack. The Asian rulers contend that an eye was taken for an eye. Our government continues to insist that the explosion in Itu Wan was not an Atlantic Confederacy missile. But for the most part, there is a weird and brooding silence from both capitals. The air is heavy with it. Despite millions of dead and wounded, there has been little waving of the bloody shirt, few cries for wholesale vengeance. Only a kind of dumb fury prevails, a feeling that murder has been done, that lunacy reigns supreme. Neither side wants total war. The Defense Command remains at battle alert. The General Staff issued an announcement, almost an appeal, to the effect that our nation will refrain from using thermonuclear devices in case of war, provided Asia does likewise. But the announcement goes on to say: 'If they use atomic weapons in any way, we shall respond with the thunderbolt, and in such force that no creature can remain alive on the Asian continent, now, or for a thousand years.'

"Lucifer hangs heavy over us all. There is fear. But because of the fear, there is hope.

"Strangely, the least hopeful note of all comes not from Guam but from New Vatican. Shortly after the Guam conference broke up, it was reported from New Rome that Pope Gregory has ceased to pray for peace in the world. Two special masses were sung in the basilica:

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the Exsurge quare obdormis, *Mass against the Heathen, and the* Reminiscere, *Mass in Time of War, and then, according to the report, His Holiness retired to the mountains to meditate and pray, not for peace, but for justice, and peace in the hearts of men.*

"And now a word from Dazzledont, your most eff—"

"Turn it off!" Zerchi groaned.

The young priest who was with him snapped off the set and stared wide-eyed at the abbot. "I don't believe it!" he grunted.

"What, about the Pope? I didn't either. But I heard it earlier, and New Rome has had time to deny it. They haven't said a word."

"What does it mean?"

"Isn't that obvious? The Vatican diplomatic service is on the job. Evidently they sent in a report on the Guam conference. Evidently it caused His Holiness some pure horror."

"What a warning, what a gesture!"

"I suggest it was more than a gesture, Father Lehy. His Holiness does not chant a Battle Mass for mere dramatic effect. And besides, most people will think he means 'against the heathen' on the other side of the ocean, and 'justice' for our side. Or if they don't think so, they'll feel that way themselves." He buried his face in his hands and rubbed them up and down. "Sleep. What's sleep, Father Lehy? Do you remember? I haven't seen a human face in ten days that didn't have black circles under its eyes. I couldn't close my eyes last night for somebody screaming over in the guest house."

"Lucifer's no sandman, that's true."

"What are you staring at out that window?" Zerchi demanded crossly. "That's another thing. Everybody keeps looking at the sky, staring up and wondering. If it's coming, you won't have time to see it until the flash, and then you'd better *not* be looking. Stop it. It's unhealthy."

Lehy turned away from the window. "Yes, Father. I wasn't watching for that, though. I was just looking at the buzzards."

"Buzzards?"

"There's been such an extraordinary lot of them, all day. Dozens and dozens of buzzards. Just circling and waiting."

"Where?"

"Over the Green Star camp down the highway."

The abbot made a sick sound. "That's no omen, then. That's just healthy vulture appetite. Agh! I'm going out for some air. Take over for awhile."

In the courtyard he met Mrs. Grales. She was carrying a basket of tomatoes which she lowered to the ground as he approached.

"I brought ye somewhat, Father Zerchi," she told him. "I saw yer sign being down, and some poor girl inside the gate, so I reckoned

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ye'd not mind a visit by yer old tumater woman. I brought ye some tumaters, see?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Grales. The sign's down because of the refugees, but that's all right. You'll have to see Brother Eltan about the tomatoes, though. He does the buying for our kitchen."

"Oh, not for buying, Father. He he! I brought 'em to ye for free. Ye've got lots to feed, with all the poor things yer putting up. So they're for free. Where'll I put 'em?"

"The emergency kitchen's in the —but no, leave them there. I'll get someone to carry them to the guest house."

"Port 'em myself. I ported them this far." She hoisted the basket again.

"Thank you kindly, Mrs. Grales." He turned to go.

"Father, wait!" she called. "A minute, yer honor, just a minute of your time—"

Zerchi suppressed a groan. "I'm sorry Mrs. Grales, but it's as I told you—" He stopped, stared at the face of Rachel. For a moment, he had imagined . . . *Had Joshua been right about it?* But no, surely, no. "It's—it's a matter for your parish and diocese, and there's nothing I can—"

"No, no, Father, not that!" she cackled. "It be somewhat else I wanted to ask of ye." (There! It *had* smiled! He was certain of it!) "Would ye hear my confession, Father? Beg shriv'ness for bothering ye, but I'm sad for my naughties, and I would it were you as shrives me."

Zerchi hesitated. "Why not Father Selo?"

"I tell ye truthful, yer honor, it's that the man is an occasion of sin for me. I go meanin' well for the man, but I look once on his face and forget myself. God love him, but I can't."

"If he's offended you, you'll have to forgive him."

"Forgive, that I do, that I do. But at a goodly distance. He's an occasion of sin for me, I'll tell, for I go losing my temper with him on sight."

Zerchi chuckled. "All right, Mrs. Grales. I'll hear your confession, but I've got something I have to do first. Meet me in the chapel in about half an hour. The first booth. Will that be all right?"

"Ay, and bless ye, sir!" She nodded profusely. Zerchi could have sworn that the Rachel head mirrored the nods, ever so slightly.

He dismissed it from thought and walked over to the garage. An attendant brought out the car for him. He climbed in, dialed his destination, and sank back wearily into the cushions while the automatic controls engaged the gears and nosed the car toward the gate. In passing the gate, the abbot saw the girl standing at the roadside. The child was with her. Zerchi jabbed at the CANCEL button. The car

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stopped. "Waiting," said the robot controls.

The girl wore a cast that enclosed her hips from waist to left knee. She was leaning on a pair of crutches and panting at the ground. Somehow she had gotten out of the guesthouse and through the gate, but she was obviously unable to go any further. The child was holding onto one of her crutches and staring at the traffic on the highway.

Zerchi opened the door and climbed out slowly. She looked up at him, but turned her glance quickly away.

"What are you doing out of bed, child?" he breathed. "You're not supposed to be up, not with that hip. Just where did you think you were going?"

She shifted her weight, and her face twisted with pain. "To town," she said. "I've got to go. It's urgent."

"Not so urgent that somebody couldn't go do it for you. I'll get Brother—"

"No, Father, no! Nobody else can do it for me. I've got to go to town."

She was lying. He felt certain she was lying. "All right, then," he said. "I'll take you to town. I'm driving in anyway."

"No! I'll walk! I'm—" She took a step and gasped. He caught her before she fell.

"Not even with Saint Christopher holding your crutches could you walk to town, child. Come on, now, let's get you back to bed."

"I've got to get to town, I tell you!" she shrieked angrily.

The child began crying monotonously.

"All right, Father," she said. "I'll ride with you to town in the car, then."

"You shouldn't be going at all."

"I can't help it, I've got to, I tell you!"

"All right. Let's go." He helped her in. The child screamed frantically when he lifted it in after the mother. It clung to her tightly and resumed the monotonous sobbing. The child's sex was difficult to determine, because of the loose wet dressings and the singed hair. Zerchi guessed it a girl, but could not be certain.

He dialed again. The car waited for a break in the traffic, then eased onto the highway.

Five monks paraded in front of the tent area two miles down the road. The abbot had meant to stop and talk to them, but now with the girl in the car he only pressed the SLOW button and watched them as the car drifted past. The monks carried signs that read: "ABANDON HOPE ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE." They walked to and fro beneath the Mercy Camp sign, but they were careful to stay on the public right-of-way. Earlier in the day a small crowd had gathered to throw stones at the pickets, but now there were two

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police cars parked at the side of the highway; several officers stood nearby and watched the picket line with expressionless faces. A Green Star official had gone huffing off to seek a writ. Zerchi knew full well that the writ would be granted, but until then they'd stay where they were.

He glanced at the statue the Green Star workers had erected near the gate. Anonymously, it was a Christ. No Christ I know, Zerchi thought furiously. The sick-sweet face, the blank eyes, the simpering lips, arms spread wide in an offer of embrace. The hips were broad, effeminate. The bosom hinted of breasts. The legend on the pedestal said: COME UNTO ME. A pervert Christ, one who'd never gone up to Golgotha, one who'd never snapped back sassily at Pilate for he was Pilate's henchman. It was the statue he'd seen in the back of the truck, with a red flag tied to its great toe. It made him a little sick.

"Lots of buzzards up there," he said quietly to his passenger.

She had one hand on the door handle and she was eying the car's controls. Zerchi nudged the SPEED button. The car shot ahead. She took her hand away from the handle.

"Don't do it, daughter, don't do it."

She sat expressionless.

"You've lost faith?"

She nodded.

"Then even if you were only an animal, you wouldn't do it. Nature imposes nothing that Nature doesn't prepare you to bear. Listen, I killed a cat once. When I was a boy. It was my cat. A truck crushed its hind legs. It dragged itself under the house and stayed there for hours, and finally it dragged itself out crying for help. There was only one kind of help I thought I could give it, and I tried. I went and got a gun. I took it out away from the house and I dug a hole. It lay there crying and crying and crying. I shot it as quick as I could. Through the head. Leaha shook her head and got up. She started dragging herself toward the bushes. I shot her again. It knocked her flat, so I put her in the hole. I shoveled some dirt on her, but before I covered her up, she started out of the hole. Toward the bushes. I was crying then, worse than she was. I had to kill her with the shovel. She was only a cat. I put her in the hole and I chopped up and down with the shovel and still she was wiggling. I never forgot it. I never will. I felt dirty for a long time. It was only a cat. But more than anything, she wanted to get to those bushes and crawl under them and lie there and wait. I wish to God I'd let her have the dignity to die the way a cat would, if you let it alone. But that was only a cat."

"Shut up," she whispered. "Just please shut up."

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"Even a cat—"

"Shut *up!*"

"All right."

They drove through the city. Zerchi stopped to mail a letter.

"Now, where did you want to go?" he asked when he was back in the car.

"Nowhere. I've changed my mind."

"But it was so urgent that you get to town!"

"No, I changed my mind."

They drove back toward the abbey. The abbot permitted himself to believe that she had lost resolve. It was a mistake. As they approached the Mercy Camp, she suddenly pressed the CANCEL button and seized the emergency.

"If you try to dial again, I'll jerk it," she panted. "You see those officers? If you try to stop me, I'll scream for help. *Now let me alone!*"

"I've let you alone, child."

"You've hounded me!"

"Not I. Conscience."

"Let *go* of me."

Zerchi held her arm in a firm grip, and he meant to hang on until he could get the emergency away from her. She thrust her head out the window as the car dragged to a halt.

"Help!"

Two police officers came toward the car. There was a brief discussion. They looked at the red tickets. One of them waved toward the picket line.

"So you're the bejeezis behind all this, are you?" one of them grunted at Zerchi.

"Let the lady go," said the sergeant. "You can't restrain her like that."

"If I refuse? Listen, Sergeant, she doesn't know what she's doing."

"She's got a red ticket. She doesn't have to know. Now let her out."

Zerchi continued fighting for control of the car. As soon as he pressed one button, the girl would jab something else. The police watched the rapid handplay for a moment, then opened the door.

"You going to make us use a little force, crusader?" growled the sergeant. "We can take you in and book you."

Zerchi knew he was going too far, but if there were even a little hope . . . He abandoned the control panel and put one arm around the child.

"Not the baby, then!" he pleaded. "Only yourself, if you must. Don't murder the baby—"

"Murder!" She laughed. "They've already done that. Listen, do you think I care about myself? It's for Gita, not me. See what they did to her? Take a good look! Hell? They don't burn babies in hell, do they? Do they?" Her eyes had taken on a crafty light. "I know what I'm doing. I know. Say what you will. Even if what you say is true, Gita doesn't have to suffer. They won't punish her. She's not old enough to know.

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Only me. So she doesn't have to wait around and suffer."

The child was screaming again. One of the officers caught Zerchi's wrist.

"Let go of the kid."

He had to obey. The monks on the picket line had stopped picketing and had drawn in a circle around the group by the car. They stood gaping. The sergeant turned from the car, saw their upraised signs, interpreted them as potential weapons. His hand fell to his gun.

"Back up!" he barked.

The monks looked at their abbot.

"Back up," he echoed weakly.

They went back to their picketing.

"C'mon, kid," said the sergeant. "Bet they'll let you ride on their merry-go-round. Help the lady, Treece."

A man came out of the roped area and approached the car. The priest recognized Doctor Cors.

"What's going on?" asked the medic. He saw Zerchi and stopped. He glanced at the woman and the child. "Oh," he grunted.

"Nothing much," said the sergeant. They started away.

Zerchi got out of the car and stalked slowly toward Cors.

"Listen, Father, I know what you're going to say, but—"

Zerchi's fist smashed an end to the speech. Cors sat down hard in the driveway. He looked bewildered. He snuffled a few times, then his nose streamed blood. The police officers came striding back. They looked bored.

"All right?" demanded the sergeant.

Nobody said anything.

"Looks like it's your afternoon to be arrested," the sergeant told the abbot.

"No!" grunted the medic, climbing to his feet. "No, I don't want any charges. I had it coming. I broke a promise. He owed me that one. Let him alone, officers."

They thought it over for awhile. "If the jail wasn't full of D.P.'s, I'd take you in," said the sergeant. He grabbed Zerchi's arm and shoved him roughly toward the car. "Get in there, get out of here, and don't come back!"

"One moment!" called a new voice.

A fat gentleman with pink cheeks approached the car. "Is your name Zerchi, Father?" he asked pleasantly.

"It is."

The fat gentleman tapped the priest's arm with a folded paper. "You have just been served," he said, then unfolded the paper and began to read. "*'Whereas the plaintiff alleges that a great public nuisance has been . . . and you are hereby commanded and enjoined to desist . . . and to appear before this court and show cause why a permanent injunction should not be . . . herein fail not, or a decree pro confesso shall be . . .'*"

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Zerchi was not listening. He climbed out of the car and went over to talk to the monks, while the process server followed along behind and read the document to him. The monks threw their signs in a big ash barrel next to the statue of the simpering Christ. Then they all went to climb in the car.

A calliope was playing somewhere in the park, and the carousel began to turn. The sergeant mopped his face, clapped the process server on the back, and they all went to their cars and drove away.

VII

The abbot found Father Lehy in his study, and there were personal matters that needed attending to.

"I've told you about that temper," Lehy scolded. "Make the Stations of the Cross, say a rosary, and keep your fists in your pockets from now on."

The younger priest was only his assistant, but there were times when Zerchi could be ordered around.

He was an hour late getting down to the chapel, but Mrs. Grales was still waiting. She was kneeling in a pew near the confessional, and she seemed half asleep. He spoke to her twice before she heard him, and when she arose she stumbled a little. She paused to feel at the Rachel face, exploring its eyelids and lips with withered fingers.

"Is something wrong, daughter?" he asked.

She looked up at the high windows. Her eyes wandered about the vaulted ceiling. "Ay, Father," she whispered. "I feel the Dread One about, I do. The Dread One's close, very close about us here. I feel need of shriv'ness, Father, and somewhat else as well."

"Something else, Mrs. Grales?"

She leaned close to whisper behind her hand. "To be giving shriv'ness to Him, as well."

The priest recoiled slightly. "To whom? I don't understand."

"To Him Who made me what I am." A slow smile spread her mouth. "I never really forgave," she hissed.

"Forgive God? But He is just! You must thank Him, not forgive Him. How can you say such a thing? Is it blasphemy? What presumption!"

Her eyes pleaded with him. "Mayn't an old tumater woman forgive Him just a little for His Justice, Father?"

He swallowed a dry place. He glanced down at her dicephalic shadow on the floor. It was a terrible Justice, this shadow shape. He could not bring himself to probe the feelings behind her words. He began adjusting his stole.

She genuflected toward the altar

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before they entered the confessional, and the priest noticed that when she crossed herself, her hand touched Rachel's forehead as well as her own. He brushed back the heavy curtain, slipped into his half of the booth, and whispered through the grille.

"What do you seek, daughter?"

"Blessings, Father, for I have sinned . . ."

She spoke haltingly. He could not see her through the mesh that covered the grille. There was only the low and rhythmic whimper of a voice of Eve, crying softly: *and I did eat*. The same, the same, everlastingly the same, and even a woman with two heads could not contrive new ways of courting evil, but could only pursue a mindless mimicry of the Original. Still, his hands shook as he listened. The rhythm of the words came dull and muffled through the cloth, like the rhythm of distant hammering. Spikes driven through palms, piercing timber. As *alter Christus* he felt the weight of each burden for a moment before it passed on to the One who bore them all. There was the business about her mate. There were the murky and secret things, things to be wrapped in dirty newspaper and buried by night.

"The absolution of abortion is reserved to the bishop," he whispered. "I cannot give you . . ."

He paused. There was a distant roaring, and the faint snort-growl of missiles being fired from the range.

"The Dread One! The Dread One!" whined the old woman.

His scalp prickled. A sudden chill of unreasonable alarm. "Quickly! An act of contrition!" he muttered. "I'll absolve you conditionally, then get out of the building. For a penance, ten Aves, ten Pater Nosters . . ."

He heard her murmuring from the other half of the stall. Swiftly he breathed a conditional absolution. Before he had finished, a light was shining through the thick curtain that cloaked the entrance.

The light grew brighter and brighter until the booth was full of bright noon. The curtain began to smoke.

"Wait, *wait!*" he hissed. "Wait till it dies."

"wait wait wait till it dies," echoed a strange soft voice from beyond the grille. It was not the voice of Mrs. Grales.

"Mrs. Grales? Mrs. Grales!"

She answered him in a thick-tongued sleepy mutter. "I never meant to . . . I never meant to . . . never love . . . love . . ." It trailed away. It was not the same voice that had answered him a moment ago.

"Now, quickly, *run!*"

Not waiting to see that she heeded him, he bounded out of the booth and ran down the aisle toward the altar. The light had dimmed, but still it roasted the

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skin with noon sunglare. *How many seconds remained?* The chapel was full of smoke.

He vaulted into the sanctuary, stumbled over the first step, called it a genuflection, and went to the altar. With frantic hands he removed the Christ-filled ciberium from the tabernacle, genuflected again before the Presence, grabbed up the Body of his God and ran for it.

The building fell in on him.

When he woke up, there was nothing but dust. He was pinned to the ground at the waist. He lay on his belly in the dirt and tried to move. One arm was free, but the other was caught under the weight that held him down. His free hand still clutched the ciberium, but he had tipped it in falling, and the top had come off, spilling several of the small Hosts.

The blast had swept him clean out of the chapel, he decided. He lay in sand, and saw the remains of a rosebush caught in a rockfall. A rose remained attached to a branch of it—one of the Salmon Armenians, he noticed, although the outer petals were singed.

There was a great roaring of engines in the sky, and blue lights kept winking through the dust. He felt no pain at first. He tried to crane his neck around and get a look at the behemoth that sat on him, but then things started hurting. His eyes filmed. He cried out softly. He would not look back again. Five tons of rock had tucked him in. It held whatever remained of him below the waist.

He began recovering the little Hosts. He moved his free arm gingerly, cautiously picked each of them out of the sand. The wind threatened to send the small flakes of Christ a-wandering. Anyway, Lord, I tried, he thought. Anyone needing the last rites? Viaticum? They'll have to drag themselves to me, if they do. Or is anybody left?

He heard no voices above the terrible roaring.

A trickle of blood kept seeping into his eyes. He wiped at it with his forearm so as to avoid staining the Wafers with gory fingers. Wrong blood, Lord, mine, not Yours. *Dealba me . . .*

He returned most of the scattered Victim to the vessel, but a few fugitive flakes eluded his reach. He stretched for them, but blacked out again.

"JesusMaryJoseph! Help!"

Faintly he heard an answer, distant and scarcely audible under the howling sky. It was the soft strange voice he had heard in the confessional, and again it echoed his words. "jesus mary joseph help."

"What?" he yelled.

He called out several times, but no answer came. The dust had begun to sprinkle down. He replaced the lid of the ciberium to keep the dust from commingling with the Wafers. He lay still for a time with his eyes closed. There

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was little pain, but only a ferocious itching that came from the captive part of him. He tried to scratch; his fingers encountered only bare rock. He clawed at it for a moment, shuddered, and took his hand away. The itch was maddening. Your wires are crossed down there, he told the lower half of himself. Bruised nerves that flashed foolish demands for scratching. Like a besieged garrison sending through frantic requisitions for bath salts while under enemy fire.

Thinking of pain reminded him of Cors. To itch, Doctor, is the only evil. That made him laugh a little. The laugh blacked him out. When the blackness passed, the itching had become pain. Breathing caused him agony. He prayed awhile, but somehow the prayers seemed unprayerful. They were no longer petitions. There was nothing left to ask for. The last prayer had already been said, the last canticle already sung.

The agony was endurable. But that inky blackness! It brooded over him. It coveted him. It waited hungrily. A big black appetite with a yen for souls. Pain he could bear. But not that Awful Dark.

The trouble with the world is not pain, Doctor Cors. No? What, then? The trouble with the world is suspicion, failure to communicate. No? How about politics? The way we raise our children? The economic structure? The premature weaning of babies?

Still 'no'? Oh, then blame anything you please, Doctor Cors. Anything but you and me.

Let him try *that* on himself, he thought. The trouble with the world is *me*. Me us Adam Man me. . . .

Eradicate everybody, then it stops itching. The trouble with the world now is that it *isn't*. He laughed weakly again, and it brought the ink.

Me us Adam Christ Man me . . . me us Adam Christ Man me . . .

It ran through his head like a swarm of gnats buzzing around. He talked aloud to drive the gnats away. "You know what, Pat?—they'd rather get nailed on it all together than each get nailed on it all alone. Want company when they bleed. *Got* company and don't know it. Christ and two thieves. Can't suffer it alone, take it by the billions, but won't believe it's coming. What for, coming? Who, me? What'd *I* do?" His voice trailed off, but after awhile it came muttering back. "Desecrate Eden murder Abel rape Tamar crucify God . . . slaughter innocents kill Joan kill Paul kill Theodore kill . . . Leibowitz, wreck minds, torture, all of it, all of it . . ." Who, me?

He looked back at the rock heap again. *More* than five tons back there. Nearly two million years back there. It pressed him down with the weight of eons. There

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was even a piece of broken skull. The jaw was missing, and the back of the head. He plucked it out of the rock heap. The blast had broken open the crypts. The bone looked very old. He dropped it in the sand beside the ciberium. "Brother," he breathed. Perhaps saint. Certainly one of the order.

What did you do for them? he asked the ancient bone. Teach them to read and write? Help them rebuild, give them Christ? Help restore a culture? Did you remember to warn them, Old Bone? Of course you did. But then, what did we forget to do, you and I, if we forgot anything?

"Bless you, Bone," he muttered, and traced a cross on its forehead with his thumb.

He heard the voice again, the soft echo-voice that had answered him before. This time it came in a kind of childish singsong: "la la la la, la-la-la . . ."

It could not be Mrs. Grales. Mrs. Grales had forgiven God and gone home, and please pardon the inversion, Lord. Was it such a terrible inversion—forgiving God for being Just?

Bombs and tantrums, because the world fell somehow short of half-remembered Eden. Listen, Old Bone, did we forget to tell them that? Forgive God first, before anything? For just sentence imposed?

Bombs and tantrums. They didn't forgive.

He slept a while. A rain came, clearing the dust. When he awoke, he was not alone. He lifted his cheek out of the mud and looked at them crossly. Three of them sat on the rubble heap and eyed him with funereal solemnity. He moved. They spread black wings and hissed nervously. He flipped a pebble at them. Two of them took wing and climbed to circle, but the third sat there doing a little shuffle-dance and peering at him gravely. Dark and ugly it was, but not like that other Inky Dark. This one coveted only the body.

"Dinner's not quite done, brother buzzard," he told it irritably. "You'll have to wait."

It would be the bird's last meal. The flash had singed the feathers, and the bird was soggy with rain. The rain itself was full of death, or so the abbot guessed.

Something rattled among the stones. The buzzard looked around, hissed angrily, and took wing.

"Help!" he shouted weakly.

"help," parroted the strange voice.

And the two-headed woman wandered into sight around a rubble-heap. She stopped and looked down at Zerchi.

"Thank God! Mrs. Grales! See if you can get Father Lehy—"

"thank god mrs. grales see if you can . . ."

He blinked away the blood haze and looked at her closely.

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"Rachel," he breathed.

"rachel."

She knelt there in front of him and settled back on her heels. She watched him with cool green eyes and smiled innocently. The eyes were alert with wonder, but she could not see his pain. The head of Mrs. Grales slept soundly on the other shoulder, while Rachel smiled. It was a young shy smile that hoped for friendship. He tried again.

"Listen, is anyone else alive? Get—"

Melodious and solemn came her answer: "listen is anyone else alive . . ." She savored the words. She enunciated them distinctly. She smiled over them. Her lips reframed them when her voice was done with them. She was trying to communicate.

But she had only just now been born. She turned her head back to smile at the sky and whispered the new words to the heavens. She nodded as if pleased. She smiled at Zerchi again. He glanced at the face of Mrs. Grales. The face was gray with the impersonal mask of coma. Somehow he knew she would never wake up. What of Rachel?

There was something in her expressions, their freedom of play on her face. Something about the eyes, a great ease and warmth and peace. There was something familiar, something half-remembered . . .

"Magnificat Dominum anima mea," he breathed on impulse. My soul doth magnify the Lord and my. . . . ?

"magnificat dominum anima mea," she murmured in reply.

Wild anxiety flared within him. "Listen! You've got to get out of here! The air, the very air, it's poisoned! Run, save yourself, go go!" He waved her wildly away. "Take anything, take everything, take a car, run, fly. Go and wash yourself. Wash the curse of us off. Live, *live!"*

They stared at each other. Somehow understanding came alive. She smiled again and touched his forehead.

"Live," she said. It was like a blessing. Then she arose and was gone. He could hear her voice trailing away in the new ruins: "la la la la, la-la-la . . ."

What *was* it about her eyes? Something human, apart-from-human. A presence, an alien lurking, a sense of something nameless. Or had it a name?

Something in the way she had looked at him, touched him, blessed him. Something about the way she had looked around at the wretched wreckage—as if she saw no wreckage at all, but only some pleasant paradise. Saw with eyes too new to know.

He found a name, but it frightened him. He shuddered at it.

"Immaculate Innocence."

It was beyond belief, this name, beyond hope that such a creature

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might walk the world again. And yet no child of Adam, she. Was it a curse in her genes, or a blessing?

Immaculate Innocence.

If true, then it was enough that he had seen. One glimpse was a bounty, and he wept a little over it. He took a bit of Christflesh from the ciberium, murmured a blessing, broke it over the vessel, and ate. Afterwards he lay with his face in the wet dirt and waited.

Nothing else ever came, nothing that he saw, or felt, or heard.

VIII

They sang as they lifted the children into the ship. They sang old space chanteys and helped the children up the ladder one at a time and into the hands of the nuns. They sang heartily to dispel the fright. When the horizon erupted, the singing stopped. They passed the last child into the ship.

The horizon came alive with flashes as the monks mounted the ladder. The horizons became a red glow. A distant cloudbank was born where no cloud had been. The monks on the ladder looked away from the flashes. When the flashes were gone, they looked back.

The visage of Lucifer mushroomed into hideousness above the cloudbank, rising slowly like some titan climbing to its feet after ages of imprisonment in the Earth.

Someone barked an order. The monks began climbing again. Soon they were all inside the ship.

The last monk to enter paused in the lock. He stood in the open hatchway and took off his sandals. *"Sic transit,"* he murmured, looking back at the glow. He slapped the soles of his sandals together, beating the dirt out of them. The glow was engulfing a third of the heavens. He scratched his beard, took one last look at the ocean, then stepped back and closed the hatch.

There came a blur, a glare of light, a high thin whining sound, and the starship thrust itself heavenward.

The breakers beat monotonously at the shore, casting up driftwood. An abandoned seaplane floated beyond the breakers. After a while the breakers caught the seaplane and threw it on the shore with the driftwood. It tilted and fractured a wing. There were shrimp carousing in the breakers, and the whiting that fed on the shrimp, and the shark that munched the whiting and found them admirable, in the sportive brutality of the sea.

A wind came across the ocean, sweeping with it a pall of fine white ash. The ash fell into the sea and into the breakers. The breakers washed dead shrimp ashore with the driftwood. Then they washed up the whiting. The shark swam out to his deepest waters and brooded in the cold clean currents. He was very hungry that season.

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Even that master of vignette, Frederic Brown, must occasionally conceive an idea which cannot (even without this introduction) be printed in full on one page. Here is a two-pager—a veritable War and Peace *among Brown vignettes, with as neatly meaningful a title as I've ever seen.*

Expedition

by FREDRIC BROWN

"THE FIRST MAJOR EXPEDITION TO Mars," said the history professor, "the one which followed the preliminary exploration by one-man scout ships and aimed to establish a permanent colony, led to a great number of problems. One of the most perplexing of which was: How many men and how many women should comprise the expedition's personnel of thirty?

"There were three schools of thought on the subject.

"One was that the ship should be comprised of fifteen men and fifteen women, many of whom would no doubt find one another suitable mates and get the colony off to a fast start.

"The second was that the ship should take twenty-five men and five women—ones who were willing to sign a waiver on monogamous inclinations—on the grounds that five women could easily keep twenty-five men sexually happy and twenty-five men could keep five women even happier.

"The third school of thought was that the expedition should contain thirty men, on the grounds that under those circumstances the men would be able to concentrate on the work at hand much better. And it was argued that since a second ship would follow in approximately a year and could contain mostly women, it would be no hardship for the men to endure celibacy that long. Especially since they were used to it; the two Space Cadet schools, one for men and one for women, rigidly segregated the sexes.

"The Director of Space Travel settled this argument by a simple expedient. He— Yes, Miss Ambrose?" A girl in the class had raised her hand.

"Professor, was that expedition the one headed by Captain Maxon?

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The one they called Mighty Maxon? Could you tell us how he came to have that nickname?"

"I'm coming to that, Miss Ambrose. In lower schools you have been told the story of the expedition, but not the *entire* story; you are now old enough to hear it.

"The Director of Space Travel settled the argument, cut the Gordian knot, by announcing that the personnel of the expedition would be chosen by lot, regardless of sex, from the graduating classes of the two space academies. There is little doubt that he personally favored twenty-five men to five women—because the men's school had approximately five hundred in the graduating class and the women's school had approximately one hundred. By the law of averages the ratio of winners should have been five men to one woman.

"However the law of averages does not always work out on any one particular series. And it so happened that on this particular drawing, *twenty-nine* women drew winning chances, and only *one* man won.

"There were loud protests from almost everyone except the winners, but the Director stuck to his guns; the drawing had been honest and he refused to change the status of any of the winners. His only concession to appease male egos was to appoint Maxon, the one man, captain. The ship took off and had a successful voyage.

"And when the second expedition landed, they found the population doubled. Exactly doubled—every woman member of the expedition had a child, and one of them had twins, making a total of exactly thirty infants.

"Yes, Miss Ambrose, I see your hand, but please let me finish. No, there is nothing spectacular about what I have thus far told you. Although many people would think loose morals were involved, it is no great feat for one man, given time, to impregnate twenty-nine women.

"What gave Captain Maxon his nickname is the fact that work on the second ship went much faster than scheduled and the second expedition did not arrive one year later, but only nine months and two days later.

"Does that answer your question, Miss Ambrose?"

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August Derleth, too long absent from these pages, returns with a gently persuasive story of a courageous woman, a tormented man, a touchingly innocent ghost . . . and the love that casts out fear.

The Dark Boy

by AUGUST DERLETH

MRS. JUDITH TIMM CAME TO TEACH at District No. 9 well past the midterm, and not without some trepidation. Just before setting out, she had had a brief, anonymous note which said only, "*Don't come.*" She was sure it had been sent by her predecessor, but that lady had gone by the time she arrived; so she settled down a little uneasily with two spinsters, Miss Abigail Moore and her sister, Miss Lettie, who lived just down the road from the schoolhouse. Like most of the parents of children who came to No. 9, they were uncommunicative people.

But they were pleasant enough. And the school was pleasant, if a little old-fashioned, still, with its lamplight instead of electricity. But then, few farms in this isolated part of the country had electricity, and the schoolhouse had less use for it than the farms did. Miss Abigail, who was on the Board of Education, was as tall and gaunt as her sister was short and plump; she explained that Miss Mason, who had been teaching at No. 9, was a nervous woman, and not well.

"Nervous as a cat," she said. "It fair gave one the creeps, it did. I don't think she liked children. She was younger than you, and, of course . . ."

"I never had any children," said Mrs. Timm. "My husband died not long after we were married."

"But you're not so old," protested Miss Lettie.

Oh, yes, I am, thought Mrs. Timm. Desperately old. "I'm thirty."

"Well, the real young ones don't have any sense, and that's a fact," said Miss Abigail primly. "I've never known it to fail. You like the schoolhouse?"

"Yes. It's airy and has a good many windows."

"We had them put in. Of course, we don't have the electricity, but then, we don't use it much at night, you see, and we have to keep expenses down."

They seemed eager to help, de-

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spite a natural reserve. But there was something unspoken in the air. Mrs. Timm did not want to ask about the anonymous warning she had received. She could wait and bide her time. She had a cozy room downstairs in the old house where the sisters lived; from it, she could look right down the road and see the schoolhouse past the long row of old soft maples which were now in late March in the full of their yellow and maroon blossoms, with the first leaves just beginning tenderly to uncurl.

The schoolhouse was of red brick. It must have been fifty years old. But the women of the district had kept it immaculate inside, and the men who could use tools had kept it up; so it looked older outside than in. She had seventeen children, spread through all the grades, and three more who came irregularly, since they were needed at home to help in the fields, now that the land was opening up once more after the winter. The children were all from the old families; it seemed there were no others. There were Perkinses, Browns, Potters, Fields, Mahans, Jefferses, Moores, and not a name that wasn't English in origin. The children were attentive; if anything, they were a little too grave with a gravity she attributed to their natural tendency to wait until time betrayed the nature of their new teacher.

"I hope I won't disappoint you after Miss Mason," she said on her first day.

They did not seem to need her assurance; they seemed quite willing to take her on her own terms, and despite their watchful gravity, she was inspired with more confidence than she thought she would have. She ordered them all in her mind, marshaling them into groups and grades so that she would soon know where each belonged, and on the evening of her first day at school, she discussed the children with the Moore spinsters, who told her about their backgrounds.

"How many have you again?" asked Miss Abigail.

"Seventeen—and then the three they say come from time to time."

A glance flickered between the sisters.

She enumerated them, one after another, and came out with sixteen. "That's funny," she said, "I seem to have forgotten one's name. He's the dark boy in the fourth grade, I think."

"Oh, yes," said Miss Lettie. "I think, sister, it's coming on for rain tonight. Shall we close the shutters?"

"But the moon's shining," protested Mrs. Timm.

"I feel rain," said Miss Lettie.

Mrs. Timm did not close the shutters over the windows of her room. Moonlight flooded the earth outside, and the night was warm. Not a cloud was in the sky. When

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Mrs. Timm stood at the window of her darkened room just before getting into bed, she looked down to where the moonlight gleamed from the schoolhouse windows. Was someone prowling about there? Or was this not, after all, her responsibility? She decided that it was not and got into bed.

The schoolhouse gave no evidence of vandalism next morning. Mrs. Timm reflected that, in this quiet country, fears for the safety of the building from night-walkers were groundless. She settled down to count her charges as they came in—sixteen. The dark boy was missing. Perhaps he, too, had had to help out at home. If it were possible to hold classes in the evening, it might assure more of the country boys a modicum of education.

That evening she returned to the schoolhouse after supper. Curiously, the spinsters tried to dissuade her. Miss Mason had not done it. Before her, Mr. Brockway had not done it. There ought not to be so much work. Perhaps the Board could make it lighter. Their assiduity was pathetic and absurd.

"I like to work," explained Mrs. Timm. "It keeps my mind off other things."

"What other things?" asked Miss Abigail bluntly, her dark eyes keen on her.

"Myself," answered Mrs. Timm simply.

Could I say to them, I am thirty, I don't feel old, I wish I had a home and children of my own? Could I say to them, each time I see them I ask myself whether I will be as they are in another twenty or thirty years? But the answer was surely self-evident. The Moore sisters were so inured to habit that even the departure of someone else from custom disturbed them; they viewed her going with misgivings plain on their homely faces.

She set out for the school while it was still dusk; the evening air was filled with the spring carols of birds; the wind blew softly out of the west, aromatic with the smell of earth freed again from winter. A moon burgeoned into the darkening heaven, and the evening star shone low in the west. The schoolhouse was set in a grove of tall maple trees—"sugar maples," the people called them; they bowered the small building and the twilight clung about them.

She set to work compiling neat records for every pupil, an onerous but not difficult task. The lamp threw a pale yellow flower of light over the worn old desk. "*Birch, Mary,*" she wrote, and followed her name with her age, the names of her parents, and other pertinent data. She worked rapidly, and presently she was well into the fourth grade. Then she remembered the dark boy who had not been in school today. She would have to

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leave a blank card for him. She went on.

But the thought of the dark boy haunted her. He had been so quiet, so withdrawn, and yet there had been such an appealing air about him, like someone lost. Despite the winsomeness of the smaller children, this boy of nine or so touched upon her long-suppressed maternal instincts as none other did.

She was aware suddenly of being watched. Looking up, she saw a face peering in from the darker side of the school building, that side opposite the moon, which opened toward a woods of some depth, beyond which lay the home of one of her irregular pupils, a small boy named Edward Robb. In a moment the face was gone. She was briefly alarmed, but almost simultaneously she realized that the face was that of a boy.

The face reappeared. She looked steadily in its direction and saw that it was faintly familiar—the slight, sensitive mouth, the dark brooding eyes, the curled hair, the scar on his forehead, over the left temple. The dark boy, of course. He had finished his work and had been drawn to the light in the schoolhouse. She half rose, beckoning him in; but he was off like a deer, too shy to be drawn in at this unusual hour.

He did not return.

When she got back home, she found Miss Abigail waiting up for her. The old lady was clearly apprehensive, and studied her face as if she were looking for some sign of travail.

"I waited up because I didn't know but what you might want something to eat when you came in," said Miss Abigail.

"No, I think not, thank you."

"Well, there's hot tea, if you want some."

"If it's ready, I'd like a cup."

"I thought you would."

When they were seated in the spare kitchen, the older woman asked, "How did the work go?"

"Very well."

"As long as you weren't disturbed, I suppose you made good progress."

Was it a question that the older woman asked? It sounded more like that than a statement.

"Oh, one of the boys looked into the window while I was at work, but he didn't come in."

The older woman's eyes were intense on her. "Which one?" she asked in a voice that was little more than a whisper.

"That dark boy—I've forgotten his name. It takes a while, you know, to get used to pupils in a new school."

The older woman's gaze lingered. What was brooding in her eyes gave way to an uncertain tranquility. She drank her tea slowly.

"It must be lonesome working there at night. I don't expect you'll have to do much of it, will you?"

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Was it a simple question she asked, or a plea she made? Mrs. Timm was disconcerted; she could not tell.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't think so."

The older woman concealed her relief well.

It was strange, thought Mrs. Timm when she was once again in her room, but the solicitude of the spinsters was almost parental. She found herself responding to it, with the response of one long in need of affection. It was understandable that they should be lonely, too, living isolated here, their farm land rented to a neighbor who seldom came in, limited in their social life to the few events which took place in the neighborhood.

On the following day, school had hardly begun when she answered a knock on the door and found herself facing a dark-eyed, black-haired man in his middle thirties, holding one of her irregulars by one hand.

"You the new teacher?" he asked.

"Yes, I'm Mrs. Timm."

"I'm Tom Robb. Brought my boy over. Don't care much about his comin' to school, but the law says he's to come; so here he is. I need him some days. He won't be regular."

"Of course. I know." She turned to the boy. "This is Edward, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's Edward. And I don't want him on any ladders, understand?"

What a peculiar request! she thought fleetingly. "I don't think we'll have to put Edward on a ladder, Mr. Robb," she said.

She met his eyes squarely. There was something in them, too, which baffled her. Perhaps it was this wall of mystery which had disturbed her predecessor. His eyes burned at her; he looked a little wild, resentful, brooding—all this lay in his eyes, together with a kind of defiant misery.

She opened the door wider. "Would you like to come in, Mr. Robb?"

He was startled and surprised. "No, thank you, ma'am." He relinquished his son's hand and pushed him forward. "You just take Edward now. He'll come home directly school's over." Hesitantly, he added, "You'll have to overlook things now and then."

"If Mrs. Robb . . ."

"The boy's mother died three years ago."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Mr. Robb."

"That's all right, ma'am. You couldn't know."

"It's the same way with me," she hastened to add in expiation. "My husband died, too, six years ago."

He smiled wintrily.

Not until after he was gone did she think about his resemblance to the dark boy. Perhaps his name,

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too, was Robb. The man, clearly, had some prejudice against education; it stood out in his defiant, resentful manner. He had not been discourteous, as if he recognized that she only represented a system he disliked, and was not herself the author of it. But he did not seem an uneducated man, and his dislike was inexplicable. He was a man not ill-favored in appearance, she thought on reflection, but, like his son, he needed caring for. Or is it my imagination? she asked herself.

That night again, the dark boy looked in at her. All day he had been absent; but so had three other boys in the upper grades. She knew they had had to take advantage of the balmy weather and work in the fields. Doubtless the dark boy, for all that he could not be more than nine or ten at most, had done so too.

This time she slipped out the door when he moved back, so that when he came up to the window once more, she was there beside him almost before he knew it. His dark face looked up at her out of the night.

"Won't you come in?" she asked.

He followed her silently, but did not go far beyond the door, keeping away from the light. There he stood, gazing at her with his brooding eyes.

"I've been looking back into the records," she said, trying to be friendly, "and I guess your name is Joel, isn't it?"

He nodded.

"You've been in the fourth grade two years," she said gently.

He nodded again.

"Wouldn't you like to learn faster, Joel?"

"Oh, yes," his voice came in an urgent hushing.

He is as shy as a deer, she thought. Her glance fell upon the scar on his forehead. It was angry, still, as if but half-healed.

"How did you hurt yourself?" she asked.

But almost instantly, almost as if he himself had answered, she knew how he had come by it.

"You fell off a ladder, didn't you?" she asked. "Here in school?"

He nodded.

Certainly he was Tom Robb's son. Perhaps it was because of what that resentful man had told her that she had known so surely what had happened to Joel. He had been hurt badly, so much was clear. His hurt was part of his father's withheld fury, the pent-up anger against schooling, the wild defiance that shone in his eyes.

At the same time she was aware of something more, a kind of hunger emanating from the boy. It touched her. He needed affection, he needed the care of the mother who had died, he needed more than his father's anger at destiny and his resentment. He needed it desperately, as something

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to keep him from his solitude and isolation. Her maternal instincts welled up.

"Come closer, Joel," she said persuasively.

He took a hesitant step forward, but he was trembling, poised for instant flight.

"Are you afraid of me?" she asked.

He shook his head.

"I'm not afraid of you," she went on. "I can teach you. If you can't come daytimes, I can teach you at night."

She stood up. Instantly he turned and was gone like the wind. The door yawned blackly where but a moment before he had passed; the moonlight lay on the floor as if no shadow but that of the trees had obscured it even for a moment.

She ran to the door, calling him. But no sound answered her save the wind's hushing in the maple trees and, far down the road, a dog barking, a cow lowing.

When she reached home, the hour was late. She had waited in vain for the dark boy to return; he had not come. Yet she could have taken oath that she had seen his face peering in at her from time to time, that he had been skulking along behind her on her way from the schoolhouse.

Despite the lateness of the hour, both the Moore sisters were still up. They sat in a kind of tension which seemed to abate a little as soon as she was in the house and it was plain that she had come to no harm. She was touched.

"You shouldn't have waited up," she chided them gently. "You make me feel guilty to keep you waiting."

"Not at all," said Miss Abigail. "We just wanted to make sure. After all, we have our responsibilities."

"And we don't take them lightly," added Miss Lettie, her pale blue eyes fluttering.

"It's such a quiet, peaceful night," she said.

"And you weren't disturbed?" inquired Miss Lettie anxiously.

She laughed. "Who would disturb me?" Then, casually, she added, "Except, of course, that fourth grade boy. Think of it—two years in the one grade! Does his father keep him at work so much he can't come to school enough to pass? I should think the law . . ." She stopped, amazed at the grimness of Miss Lettie's stare, a grimness more artfully concealed by Miss Abigail.

"What boy?" asked Miss Lettie in a voice that squeaked with fear.

"That dark boy—I've forgotten his name. But he looks like Tom Robb; he must be one of his boys. Or his brother, if he has one."

"Oh!" cried Miss Lettie. "I told you, Abbie! You'll have to move the schoolhouse. You'll have to get a new place."

"Hush, Lettie! Go on, Mrs. Timm."

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"I did manage to get him in tonight, and I talked with him a while. He seems so pathetically eager for attention and affection, but he's so shy! I suppose he misses his mother. His father . . ."

Miss Lettie got up, her handkerchief pressed against her mouth. She left the room, her eyes wild.

Mrs. Timm was amazed. She looked toward Miss Abigail. "Whatever have I said?"

"You must overlook my sister's emotionalism, Mrs. Timm," said Miss Abigail in an unsteady voice. "Did the boy speak to you?"

"Only a little. He answered most of my questions with a nod—just as if, why, as if he were afraid to speak."

"Mrs. Timm, may I ask you a question? I don't want to seem impertinent . . ."

"Why, of course."

"Did you know Miss Mason?"

"No."

"Did you ever speak to her, or correspond with her?"

"No, I didn't. But wait—"

Now was the time, Mrs. Timm thought, the time to inquire about the anonymous note she had received. She went hurriedly to her room and came back with it. She laid it down before Miss Abigail, whose eyes lowered to it.

"I don't know who sent it," explained Mrs. Timm. "I thought it might have been Miss Mason."

"Yes. It looks like her handwriting." Miss Abigail folded the note and handed it back to Mrs. Timm. "Poor woman! Perhaps we did her an injustice."

Mrs. Timm was more mystified than ever. She was beginning to feel a guilty bond of sympathy with Miss Mason. There was no explanation of the mysterious conduct of the spinsters; it baffled her. She sat for a long time in her moonlit room and sought some solution to the riddle. There was none; she sank only deeper into perplexity. If all the people of this rural community were as strange as the Moore sisters and Tom Robb, she could understand why a sensitive young woman such as Miss Mason must have been could not have stood up against them. How tense, how strange they all were! As if they labored under some problem which was insoluble.

In the morning she sought in vain for any sign of the sisters' nocturnal distress. She set out for school earlier than usual because she had made up her mind that something must be done for the dark boy; he must be helped, and there was only one way in which to do it. She herself must talk to Tom Robb.

She found him in his barn. He had just finished milking and the cows had been turned out. He had no sooner caught sight of her than he spoke, his voice cutting across her "Good morning, Mr. Robb."

"I need Ed myself today," he said. "He can't come."

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"It wasn't Edward I came to see you about," she answered. "I wanted to talk about your older boy—the one with the scar on his forehead. Joel."

He dropped the pail he had in his hand. In one great stride he loomed immediately above her, his eyes blazing. He caught hold of her arms and shook her savagely, shouting at her, "What are you talking about! Why are you tormenting me like this? Why can't people leave us alone?" in a voice that was wild with despair and grief and anger.

She was too astonished and frightened to protest. She was passive in his grasp, recognizing instantly that there was no wriggling out of his strong hands. His temper passed; he let go of her, put one hand up to his forehead, and fell back a step, breathing hard. "Sorry," he muttered thickly. "I guess I lost control."

She repressed her indignation at sight of his eyes; there were tears there. She forgot her bruised arms.

"What have I said, Mr. Robb?"

He turned his eyes full upon her, suspicion rising in his sober gaze. "Don't you know?" he asked. "Didn't they tell you?"

"No one hereabouts tells me anything," she said simply.

"Didn't they tell you my boy, Joel, fell off a ladder in the schoolhouse and cracked his head open? It started to heal over—but it never did. He died two years ago. Ed's all I got left." His voice was chokingly hoarse.

For a piercing moment she thought the floor would give way under her. She fought for control.

She put one hand on his arm. "I'm sorry. I didn't know. But it explains everything. I've seen him."

"I have, too. What can I do?"

"You're afraid of him," she said simply.

He nodded dumbly, his eyes miserable.

"I guess maybe that's the trouble," she said. "He comes every night when I'm at the schoolhouse. Perhaps it's a mistake to be frightened."

But it was only his patent misery and need that held down her own chill fear. Once out of sight of the snug little Robb home, where he could not see her, she leaned breathlessly against a tree. There is no dark boy, she said to herself. Somehow, her imagination had played a dreadful trick on her. Dead two years! They had never taken his name off the records. Just stopped in the middle of the fourth grade. No dark boy! She repeated it over and over.

But she could not convince herself. That first day he had been sitting in the corner seat. She remembered asking his name; he had not given it. She remembered asking another boy, who only looked toward the seat and shook his head. How grave the children

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had been that day! And each night . . . Oh, no, it could not be!

When she returned to the Moore house for supper that evening, she was determined to face the spinsters with her discovery.

"Why didn't anyone tell me the schoolhouse was haunted?" she asked quietly.

"Oh!" cried Miss Lettie, looking accusingly at her sister. "I told you, Abbie—"

"Hush, Lettie," said Abigail with authority. "Is it?" she asked Mrs. Timm.

"The dark boy—Joel Robb. You knew."

Miss Abigail shook her head. "No, I didn't know. I've never seen him. Neither has Lettie. It's only what we've heard. Only a very few people have seen him. Miss Mason said she had. After that, Mr. Robb confessed he had. Perhaps we've done both of them a grave wrong, because you couldn't have known. We made sure Miss Mason was gone before you came. But that first day, of course, the children reported that you spoke to an empty seat—that was why, you see, we were so apprehensive. I suppose you will want to leave."

She spoke with regret.

Mrs. Timm's first impulse was to say yes, she wanted to go. But she did not give it voice. "No," she answered. "I have no intention of leaving. If Mr. Robb has lived with that ghost for two years, I guess it won't harm me any. I'll try to be more careful in front of the children, and we'll say no more about it."

The two old women looked at her with no attempt to conceal their incredulity.

How could I have been so tranquil? she asked herself later, as she sat in the moonlit schoolhouse, waiting. She knew he would come. He must come now. But she had to fight down fear; it was only natural that she should wait now with trepidation and anxiety. The wind in the maples, lashing the thin twigs high up heaven, the occasional clouds which shadowed the moon, the isolation and loneliness of the countryside, the night's deep silence—all combined to supplant the afternoon's somnolence with eeriness.

Quite suddenly he was there, his face at the window, the scar black against the night. This was the test, she knew. For a moment she hesitated. Then she smiled and raised her hand to beckon him in.

He came in as before, slipping silently into the dimly lit room to stand shyly near the door. How tenuous he was! Now that she knew, it was plain.

"Hello, Joel," she said easily. "Did you come to learn tonight?"

He nodded. Scarcely a movement of air. How could she have misunderstood?

"Sit down."

He went back to the corner seat,

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the same seat in which she had first seen him, the one he had had when . . . There he sat, almost invisible in the shadows. He was himself no more than shadow.

"Shall we read a story tonight, Joel?" she asked.

Did he answer "Yes" or not? She could not be sure. But with each word she uttered, her uneasiness diminished a little and finally fell away from her, and the affection she had felt for this lost ghost returned. She read to him, interrupting herself from time to time to speak to him directly. She finished a story, and went on to another.

The door, which had stood ajar, for the night was warm, swung open a little farther. She looked up.

Tom Robb stood there, his hands clenched at his sides, his face turned to the corner seat.

"Your father's come to take you home, Joel," she said quietly.

A half-strangled exclamation came from Tom Robb.

She bent over and blew out the lamp. In a moment the reflected glow of the moonlight lit the room. She stood up.

The boy sat where he was, unmoving, a shadowy outline in shadow.

She walked down and over to where Tom Robb stood. She put her hand in his and turned to the corner where the dark boy sat. The seat was faintly visible through him.

"Will you come home with us, Joel?" she asked.

She felt, rather than saw him glide out of the seat toward them. She held out her hand. She felt the man at her side begin to shrink away, and tightened her hold on his rough fingers.

"Please, Tom," she said.

He relaxed.

The boy came on slowly, hesitantly, fearfully. He came almost up to them; there he stopped.

She turned without a word and walked out of the schoolhouse, still holding to Tom Robb's hand. Without looking around, she knew the boy was following.

In this fashion they walked through the woods back to the farm in the valley beyond, she and the stumbling man and the evanescent boy who had once walked this way like any other growing child.

At the house he was gone.

Robb flung himself into the house, exhausted. He sat down at the kitchen table, put his head down on his arms, and sobbed.

"Two years of it," he cried. "It like to drove me crazy. They all said I was crazy—every one of 'em. They ran Miss Mason out. They'll run you out the same way, you'll see."

She stood for a moment looking compassionately down at him. She put one hand gently on his thick dark hair. How soft it was! And inside, he was soft, too, she knew.

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"I'd better go now," she said.

He turned and grasped one of her hands. "Don't go, Mrs. Timm!"

"I must," she said. "But nobody's going to run me out. I aim to stay. I expect to be back here."

He looked past her to the windows. "Has he gone?"

"If you could just get used to not being afraid of him," she said, "you'd never notice him. I did, before I knew. Now that I know, it doesn't make any difference. He's just lonesome. And so are you. And, if it comes down to it, so am I. Most people are. After all, you're his father; he's got a right to look for some affection from you. I must go now, Tom."

He looked at her with challenge and wonder in his eyes. "You called me 'Tom'!"

"I'd better get used to it," she said. "Good night."

Outside there was nothing but the moonlight.

He came out after her. "I can't let you walk home alone, Mrs. Timm," he said gruffly. "If you don't mind, I'll walk you back."

"I don't mind at all."

"But if . . ." He hesitated. "When you tell them you aim to stay, they'll say you're crazy, too. They'll say you're out of your head."

"Then that'll make two of us," she answered tranquilly.

Coming Next Month

There'll be a very special treat for science fiction readers in our next issue, on the stands around February 1. Gore Vidal's VISIT TO A SMALL PLANET, justly acclaimed as the first mature s.f. written directly for television, was so successful on the air that it's now in rehearsal for a Broadway opening soon. To celebrate this Broadway event and to satisfy all of you who cannot see the New York production, we bring you the complete original three-act teleplay—adroit, suave, witty and wholly delightful. This issue will also include a pointed story of new cultural problems in time travel, by Poul Anderson and Kenneth Gray; a novelet of Martian exploration and paranormal mental powers, by Charles L. Fontenay; stories by Robert Sheckley, Richard Matheson, Robert Bloch and other favorites; and F&SF's annual survey of science-fantasy publishing in the year just past, with a checklist of the best books of 1956.

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"Science fiction" is a term so familiar today that you may well be incredulous to learn that over a dozen other labels for this brand of imaginative literature were in professional use before the phrase "science fiction" was even invented, let alone established. It is possibly even more incredible that never before has any scholar attempted to track down the date and circumstances of that history-making coinage.

Sam Moskowitz is not only an enthusiast, a writer and a onetime editor of science fiction; he is the foremost historian of the field. It is fitting that he should add to such services as the editing of SCIENCE FICTION + *and the writing of that absorbing history of fandom,* THE IMMORTAL STORM, *the tremendous labor of research that has gone into this article—a permanently valuable footnote to English philology and to the history of American letters.*

How Science Fiction Got Its Name

by SAM MOSKOWITZ

NO MAN WITH ANY REAL KNOWLEDGE of the literary world and only a diminishing percentage of the general public any longer misunderstands the term "science fiction." As a field of literature, science fiction still lacks a satisfactory definition, but it does not suffer from the absence of a name.

Since no man has ever stepped forward to claim the origin of the term "science fiction", the logical thing to assume is that like Topsy, it just grew.

It grew all right, but considerable research made to ascertain the earliest date of its use as a separate term and how it developed reveals that it also had a gardener.

When Jules Verne started the first big wave of popularity for scientific speculative adventure with *Five Weeks in a Balloon,* published in France in 1863, the French publishers and the general press created a term for such stories: VOYAGES EXTRAORDINAIRES.

"Extraordinary voyages" became synonymous with the name Jules Verne, covering both what we consider his science fiction and his adventure-narratives of more realistic

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voyages.* His self-acknowledged imitators, cashing in on the popularity of such great tales as *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Voyage to the Center of the Earth,* were forced to call their works VOYAGES EXCENTRIQUES.

In England, Verne's stories were dubbed SCIENTIFIC ROMANCES, and the term became so entrenched that when C. A. Hinton wrote a series of semi-fictional scientific speculations as to the nature of the fourth dimension and other imaginative subjects in 1888, they were published under the title of *Scientific Romances.*

The rise of H. G. Wells with his *The Time Machine, The War of the Worlds,* and *When the Sleeper Wakes,* towards the end of the 19th century, found him inheriting that term along with the frequent use of SCIENTIFIC FANTASIES to describe some of his work that seemed too scientific to be fantasy and too borderline to be scientifically plausible. SCIENCE FANTASY is still commonly used today to describe work of that nature.

"Scientific romance," as a term, lingered to as recent a date as 1930, but it was already on the downgrade at the turn of the century as "romance" began to be thought of as love and kisses first and unusual adventure secondarily, if at all.

The need for some definite term to apply to scientific stories became increasingly acute as publications regularly featuring them became established in the United States. Frank Tousey's Frank Reade Library, begun in 1892, published stories which were referred to as THE JULES VERNE TYPE, written by Luis Senarens, a 16-year-old youngster disguised as "Noname." The inventions and adventures of Frank Reade ran for 192 weekly issues until the charge was brought against them that they were ruining the minds of the younger generation. As a sop to misguided fevers of the time, Frank Tousey discontinued the series.

Frank Munsey then carried the ball for those who preferred their entertainment in the tradition of Jules Verne. When he changed the teen-age *Golden Argosy* into *Argosy* in 1896 and adopted a more adult formula, he began to use such stories with increasing frequency. As he launched other adventure magazines later, such as *Scrap Book, All-Story, Munsey* and *Cavalier,* fanciful tales of science became a regular part of the reading fare presented by each.

Since it was apparent that such fiction had a loyal following who swore by their literary choice as a devout man justifies his religion, it soon became imperative that some term be created to let those readers know their "poison" was on tap and thereby insure their patronage. At first such tales were referred to as OFF-TRAIL STORIES, but this was

*cf. Anthony Boucher, *Jules Verne: Voyagiste,* F&SF, September, 1956.

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too all-inclusive and could also mean anything from a story told in the second person to a western yarn with a Christmas setting. To solve the problem, *Argosy* created the term DIFFERENT STORIES. For years, when the simple word "different" was carried in announcing a story, the connoisseurs knew what was coming.

Another term often found in the readers' departments of Munsey magazines was IMPOSSIBLE STORIES. That term received some use up until about 1920 when it all but disappeared.

Still, editors of Munsey publications found that "different" was not specific enough. It was awkward to state in every issue that "we will continue to present 'different stories.'" Therefore they evolved a new term that received widespread use throughout the publishing world, and in the early twenties was by far the most popular single reference to the genre, even though everything else under the sun kept popping up. The new term was PSEUDO-SCIENTIFIC STORIES, and they might still be using it today if it hadn't been for Hugo Gernsback.

Hugo Gernsback came to this country from Luxembourg as a very young man. He founded the first radio store in the United States, issued the first radio parts catalog, and built and sold the first home commercial (wireless) radio set. In 1908, when he was only 24 years old, he began publishing *Modern Electrics*, the world's first radio magazine. In 1909, he was first in America to use the word *television* in a technical article in that publication. Indeed, he was so impatient with the slow progress of science as compared to the powers of his imagination that he wrote a novel of the future which he serialized in his magazine, titled *Ralph 124C 41+*, in which he predicted everything from night baseball to space travel, and, most fabulous of all, though the year was only 1911, diagramed radar and described how it would work!

This love of scientific literature stayed with Gernsback, and as the title of his publication changed from *Modern Electrics* to *Electrical Experimenter* and finally to *Science and Invention*, he began using stories of that nature so frequently that by 1922 he was running two or more an issue.

There was, however, a real difference between the type of science story Gernsback ran and that run in *Argosy*. Gernsback *insisted* that the basic tenets of each story be scientifically accurate. Therefore the term popularly employed at the time, "pseudo-scientific," was abhorrent to him. He had to find a new term that would have a more dignified connotation.

The problem of devising a new term was brought to a head when it was decided to make up a cover for *Science and Invention* composed of a number of miniature

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make-believe magazine covers and logos, each showing a different department or regular feature of the magazine. Among the contrived cover logos were Popular Astronomy, Motor Hints, Wrinkles, Recipes and Formulas, etc. Since two science stories were used in every issue, this was too important a part of the magazine to be excluded. The result was SCIENTIFIC FICTION, probably the very first use of that particular term, and most certainly the first time it was used prominently.

The use of the term itself also presaged the creation of a publication of that type by crystallizing the name into a magazine cover design on the front cover of the December, 1922 issue of *Science and Invention*.

All science tales in Gernsback publications from that time on were referred to as "scientific fiction," with infrequent lapses into SCIENTIFIC STORIES. It is important to note that the use of the word "fiction" instead of the more commonly used "stories" is the element that gave "scientific fiction" as well as the later "science fiction" the distinction that won them popularity.

Since its metamorphosis as an adult magazine, a respectable portion of *Argosy*'s readership had been made up of followers of fantastic literature. There were many other good adventure magazines on the stands, such as *Blue Book, Popular, Top Notch, Adventure, Complete Stories,* and *Short Stories,* but *Argosy,* which featured the best and the most so-called "pseudo-scientific stories," enjoyed the top sales.

As a general fiction magazine, *Argosy* rarely ran more than one such story an issue, and occasionally it had a lapse and did not run any.

Gernsback's *Science and Invention* regularly ran two and sometimes more. In addition, its popular science features were so speculative in character as to virtually qualify as prophetic stories in non-fiction form. On top of this, its frequent references attesting to the accuracy of the science in the stories gave them such an air of respectability and prescience as to prove irresistible to devotees.

Undoubtedly *Argosy* was losing a portion of its fantastic story following to *Science and Invention*—all the more so since *Argosy* highlight "pseudo-scientific story" authors, such as George Allan England and Ray Cummings, were being featured in *Science and Invention,* in addition to its own crew of "scientific fiction" writers.

The importance Gernsback placed upon recruiting readership from itinerant science story lovers became vigorously apparent with the August, 1923 issue of *Science and Invention*.That issue contained six stories, and emblazoned on the cover in type 1½ inches high were the words: SCIENTIFIC FICTION NUMBER. The full-color

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cover, painted by Howard V. Brown, who later became a cover illustrator for Street and Smith's *Astounding Stories,* featured a space-suited figure from a scene in G. Peyton Wertenbaker's serial, *The Man From the Atom.*

That *Argosy* was well aware of the competition it was getting, particularly the appeal of the term "scientific fiction" with its promise of scientific accuracy, was soon evidenced. The scientific novel, *The Radio Man* by Ralph Milne Farley, which began in the June 28, 1924 issue of *Argosy-All Story* magazine, was prefaced by the equivalent of a full-page editorial stressing the fact that this story marked a departure in *Argosy,* since it was written by a scientist and all the science contained therein was scientifically accurate! On the cover this story was called A SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURE.

It is not precisely certain at what point *Argosy* first used Gernsback's term "scientific fiction," but by the September 14, 1929 issue, in a biography of Ray Cummings, popular fiction writer specializing in scientific adventures, the editor of *Argosy* used "scientific fiction" three times and other terms not at all!

Argosy and *Science and Invention* were not, however, the only magazines active on the "scientific fiction" scene at the time. *Weird Tales* magazine was founded in March, 1923. Its editor, Edwin Baird, ran science stories along with tales of witches, goblins, ghouls, vampires and werewolves. In the First Anniversary Issue of that publication, dated May-June-July, 1924, Mr. Baird informed his readers that *Weird Tales* was dedicated to printing two primary classifications of fiction. One was the weird tale with all its ramifications of distorted psychology and horror. The other was the HIGHLY IMAGINATIVE STORY, which was Baird's term for what Gernsback called "scientific fiction."

Within a few months, however, *Weird Tales* had adopted *Argosy*'s term of "pseudo-scientific stories" on its contents page. It is of parenthetical interest to note that "pseudoscientific" was often used as a single word by *Argosy.*

Since the earliest days, a characteristic of the reader of this literature has been his enthusiasm for writing letters to the editor. He writes out of all proportion to his numbers. New publishers of science fiction magazines, accustomed to getting one or two letters a month for their other pulps, have been astonished to find their magazine getting from 50 to 200 an issue. Such letters to *Science and Invention* undoubtedly encouraged Gernsback to attempt an all "scientific fiction" magazine—as though he needed any particular encouragement.

In 1925, Hugo Gernsback mailed thousands of circulars to subscrib-

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ers to *Science and Invention,* announcing that he was about to launch a new magazine dealing with the worlds of tomorrow, interplanetary travel and scientific invention in the tradition of Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. To create a name for the new magazine Hugo Gernsback contracted "scientific fiction" into SCIENTIFICTION and projected that as the title of the publication.

The response was slightly less than enthusiastic. Market research would have revealed what is generally known today, that followers of fantastic fiction of all types are in a large part collectors and dislike subscribing for fear their copy will be damaged in transit. Secondly, they cannot bear the thought of having to wait for a publication delayed in the mails when it is plainly visible on the newsstand. Present-day publishers, aware of these facts, often induce additional subscriptions by promising that copies will be mailed flat in sturdy envelopes so as to arrive *ahead* of newsstand date. Gernsback had no way of knowing this.

Feeling that perhaps the magazine name *Scientifiction* lacked general appeal, Gernsback waited a year and then, without asking anyone, set the title *Amazing Stories* down on the newsstands of the United States.

Though the magazine was *Amazing Stories,* the sub-title that ran on the editorial page read: "The Magazine of Scientifiction." The editorial of the first issue was devoted to telling readers just what "scientifiction" was. The editorial of the third issue called the readers "scientifiction fans." Shortly, the spine of the magazine carried a dual legend: *Amazing Stories: Scientifiction.* A contest was sponsored to find an artistic symbol for "scientifiction." The term "scientifiction" was used everywhere in the magazine and pushed by every promotional device at Gernsback's call (which included one of New York's earliest radio stations, WRNY) to popularize it as *the* term when referring to tales of spacesuits and rayguns.

The new publication was an immediate success. After a few issues it achieved a newsstand sale of 100,000. This figure, for a 25¢ publication of specialized appeal in the twenties, was considered quite a respectable one.

So fine a response indicated that a ready-made audience existed for "scientifiction." Where did it come from?

Some came from the ranks of *Science and Invention.* Most were recruited at the expense of *Argosy,* and a sizable number from *Weird Tales.*

The latter publication, now edited by Farnsworth Wright, who had purchased a controlling interest in the company, recognized the threat instantly.

Though afflicted with a form of

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cerebral palsy as an after-effect of sleeping sickness contracted during World War I—an illness which left him with an involuntary shake and shiver which could have made him the butt of grim humor, since he edited a magazine calculated to scare the daylights out of its readers—Wright brilliantly managed his publication through trying times. He discovered and encouraged dozens of authors who are today ranking names in the literary field and eventually became one of the most beloved and respected figures in pulp circles.

He recognized that Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* was directly competing with him, since it could easily siphon off readers that read *Weird Tales* primarily for its scientific stories. A still greater threat was the term "scientifiction" with its connotation of literary respectability that by implication wooed the reader with the thought: "If it isn't scientifiction it can't be scientifically accurate."

The first issue of *Amazing Stories* was dated April, 1926. The June, 1926 issue of *Weird Tales* carried a two-page editorial by Wright informing his readers that "pseudo-scientific stories" was a misnomer for the tales of science carried in his magazine. He stressed the point that there was a strong basis of science in all the science stories published in his magazine.

Wright knew he had to find a new term, and fast. The term had to have the word *science* in it, but it would not be prefaced by *pseudo,* which meant fake. Neither could the new term be "scientific fiction" or "science stories" alone, because his readership was divided into two factions. One wanted all "pseudo-science stories" eliminated and only weird material published. The other bemoaned the fact that too few stories of this type were being published. To make them both happy, Wright hit upon the combination WEIRD-SCIENTIFIC STORIES. This he used for the first time in the July, 1926 issue, announcing a forthcoming "weird-scientific story" by Marion Heidt Mimms, titled "The Chair." "Pseudo-scientific stories" was dropped for good. The implication was that while the magazine would continue to print bigger and better science stories, in which the science would be accurate, they would be weird to boot!

This was the status of the field as far as the use of terms was concerned, up until the end of the decade. Gernsback used "scientifiction" in all of his publications, which included *Amazing Stories, Amazing Stories Quarterly, Science and Invention,* and *Radio News.* (It is worth noting that Gernsback took a flyer at the world's first television magazine, *Television News,* in 1927, which he published for two years.) *Argosy* gradually discarded "different stories" and "pseudo-scientific stories" and in serious discussion adopted Gerns-

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back's earlier term of "scientific fiction." *Weird Tales* grimly held to its own term "weird-scientific."

Oddly enough, the last use of the term created by *Argosy,* "different stories," may not have been by *Argosy* at all, since *Mind Magic Magazine,* in its June, 1931 issue, announced a Ralph Milne Farley story scheduled for its next number as a "different" story.

In 1929, Hugo Gernsback lost control of the Experimenter Publishing Corp. and of *Amazing Stories.* Though the Editor-in-Chief position was nominally held by Arthur H. Lynch, editorial supervision of the publication passed into the hands of Dr. T. O'Connor Sloane, son-in-law of Thomas A. Edison, and a bearded octogenarian whose major claim to fame was the invention of the self-recording photometer, a device for recording the illuminating power of gas. His imagination also departed with the gas-lit era, for one of his favorite pastimes was to chide the childish notions of his readers that space travel would ever be possible!

Sloane had formerly been employed by Gernsback in the capacity of Associate Editor of *Amazing Stories.* In his first editorial in the May, 1929 issue, Sloane reverted to the use of the original Gernsback term "scientific fiction." The editorial page still bore the subtitle "The Magazine of Scientifiction" and the word "scientifiction" stayed on the backstrip of the magazine, but the spell was broken—for the first time a term other than "scientifiction" was used in an all-science-story magazine!

Between leaving his old company and organizing a new one, Gernsback left scarcely a thirty-day lapse. The initial publication of his new company was *Science Wonder Stories,* and the first issue of that magazine was dated June, 1929.

The real distinction that accrues to Science Wonder Stories, *however, was that it was the first publication in history to use the actual term* SCIENCE FICTION *in its pages.*

Technically, the term was first professionally used in Hugo Gernsback's editorial, "Science Wonder Stories," in the first issue, dated June but published in May, 1929. Actually, it is used as a matter of policy throughout the entire magazine, even down to letters in the readers' columns.

Though this marked the first use of "science fiction" in a publication, it did not denote the first use of the term in a chronological historical sense. That distinction also goes to Gernsback, who wrote a form letter over his signature in 1929, which was mailed to former subscribers of *Amazing Stories* and *Science and Invention,* announcing the new magazine and offering $50 for the best letter on the subject: "What Science Fiction Means To Me."

Among those receiving honorable mention for replying to that letter

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were today's famous science fiction authors Edward E. Smith, Ph.D. and Jack Williamson. They were certainly unaware of the fact that they were among the earliest human beings in history to use the term "science fiction" in any manner!

A careful searching of the six-point type of the readers' letters in all the issues of *Amazing Stories* before that date, and careful perusal of every other publication in any way connected with the publication of fantastic literature, fails to reveal the use of the words "science fiction" anywhere, even inadvertently, before the June, 1929 issue of *Science Wonder Stories*.

When this fact was brought home to him, Gernsback recalled that he had invented the new term to have something different from his former publication. "Scientifiction," through his own efforts, was inextricably associated with *Amazing Stories* (which he no longer published) and no other publication.

So the term "science fiction" came into existence, so quietly that its origin was hardly noted at the time and has been almost forgotten, even by the man who created it.

Since Gernsback did not beat the drums for the general adoption of the term "science fiction," how and under what conditions did it come to be universally accepted?

"Science fiction" (without the hyphen) was used throughout all of Gernsback's science fiction magazines as a matter of policy. At that time he had more such magazines than any other publisher, following *Science Wonder Stories* with *Air Wonder Stories, Science Wonder Stories Quarterly,* and *Scientific Detective Monthly,* in addition to a group of booklets called *Science Fiction Series* and an attempt at paperbound books known as *Science Fiction Classics.*

In late 1929, another magazine entered the field of tales of space and time. This was *Astounding Stories of Super Science,* the first issue of which was dated January, 1930. Here was recorded the first major use of the term SUPER SCIENCE as a title for the genre. Would *Astounding* now attempt to popularize it?

The fourth (April, 1930) issue supplied the answer. In the first readers' column, titled "Reader's Corner," Harry Bates (*Astounding's* initial editor and the man who later went on to write the story upon which the moving picture *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was based) handed Gernsback a quick decision. The words "science fiction" were used exclusively in his introductory notes.

Since Gernsback's departure, *Amazing Stories* had shown a tendency to swing away from "scientifiction," the term which Gernsback had made synonymous with the magazine, to "scientific fiction." This trend continued in a new book

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review column, "In the Realm of Books," handled by the science fiction collector C. A. Brandt, which carried the subtitle, "Mostly Scientific Fiction." This column, inaugurated in the September, 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories,* had the distinction of being the first book review column ever to appear in a science fiction magazine.

(Today's science fiction readers, aware of the fact that science fiction books have been published in quantity only for the past ten years, may wonder what Brandt found to review. The fact is that a minor boom in the publication of science fiction books took place in this period, partially as a result of the mushroom expansion of magazine science fiction during 1929. C. A. Brandt did not limit his selections to science fiction alone, but also would review good weird and fantasy material. In addition, he read many languages and reviewed new science fiction books that appeared in Germany, France and Italy, as well as the United States and Great Britain. The first two books reviewed were *The Greatest Adventure* by John Taine and *The Great Weird Stories,* edited by Arthur Neale. These were followed in quick succession by reviews of *The Light in the Sky* by Herbert Clock and Eric Boetzel, *Beware After Dark!* edited by T. Everett Harré, *Electropolis* by Otfrid von Hanstein, *The Earth Tube* by Gawain Edwards, *The Maracot Deep* by Arthur Conan Doyle, and *The Day of the Brown Horde* by Richard Tooker.)

In this column, as well as in his blurbs, sub-titles and cover listings, editor Sloane first employed the term "scientific fiction" and then, starting with his readers' columns, gradually and painstakingly adopted the uniform use of "science fiction" throughout the magazine. The process took three years.

Farnsworth Wright did not cotton to "science fiction" until 1934, when his ever-critical circulation problem forced him to let the public in on the fact that "science fiction" as well as "weird-scientific" stories could be found in his magazine. He still continued to use "weird-scientific" occasionally until he left the publication in 1939.

Though the term "science fiction" obtained general recognition in the field, no magazine carried it as the title or as part of the title of the publication.

The first publications to break the precedent were not professional journals, but semi-professional efforts published by the fans of science fiction themselves.

Among those fans were Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster, who were to rise from their initial humble efforts to become the original creators of the comic strip character Superman. They published, out of Cleveland, a mimeographed fiction magazine titled purely and simply *Science Fiction.* The October, 1932

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date of the first issue (the magazine lasted five numbers) lost them the distinction of being the first publication to use "science fiction" in the title by one month. That honor goes to the *Science Fiction Digest,* a printed monthly combination science fiction fan magazine and trade journal, whose first issue was dated September, 1932.

More than five years were to pass before the term was used in a professional title. Eventually, *Astounding Stories,* with John W. Campbell, Jr., in editorial control, changed its title to *Astounding Science-Fiction* with its March, 1938 number. The hyphen was kept in the title until November, 1946, when it was silently dropped.

One year later, Blue Ribbon Publications rang up another "first" by publishing the initial newsstand magazine to be called simply *Science Fiction.* The first issue was dated March, 1939.

Primary credit for the introduction and spread of "science fiction" as a proper name for the genre in non-fantasy markets belongs to the writers' magazines, such as *Author & Journalist, Writer's Digest, The Writer,* etc. Editors publishing in the tradition of Verne and Wells called their medium "science fiction" when sending editorial requirements to the writers' magazines. Such requirements were published as received. In that way, the entire publishing field came to refer to this new branch of magazine publishing as "the science fiction field."

Acceptance of the term, even publication of any significant quantity of science fiction material, was much slower in the book world. Pocket Books, Inc., broke the ice when they permitted Donald A. Wollheim, a former editor, writer and fan of science fiction, to talk them into publishing *The Pocket Book of Science-Fiction* in 1943.

A similar welcome in hardcover book-publishing had to wait until after World War II, when Crown issued, in 1946, *The Best in Science Fiction,* edited by Groff Conklin, a real estate expert who took to science fiction as an avocation.

The virility of the term "science fiction" is no better illustrated than in the manner in which it has taken hold in foreign nations. In England, Scotland, Canada and Australia, "science fiction" is quite frequently part of the title of science fiction magazines. The expression is equally popular in France where one publication was titled simply *Science Fiction Magazine* and where *Fiction* continues to spread the gospel by drawing for the main part from *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* for its content.* The Dutch magazine *Planeet* ran the subtitle "science fiction" as does the Swedish periodical *Hapnal*

*By some inexplicable phenomenon of French linguistics, *la science* is feminine, as is *la fiction; le science fiction* is masculine.—A.B.

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The German usage of UTOPISCHE ROMANE (Utopian novels) to describe tales of space and time has bowed to "science fiction," largely due to the missionary work of the fan groups in that country.

The popular terms that preceded "science fiction" in this country died slowly. They died hard. But they died!

After purchasing *Wonder Stories* from Gernsback, Standard Magazines changed its title to *Thrilling Wonder Stories* and slanted it towards a younger group of readers. In time *Thrilling Wonder Stories* begat *Startling Stories,* which, in its first issue, dated January, 1939, ran on its spine the slogan: "The Best in Scientifiction." This it continued to do up until January, 1953, when trimming the pulp edges necessitated redesigning the publication, and the slogan was dropped.

That marked the end of the prominent usage of the word "scientifiction" except for a technicality. An abbreviation of "scientifiction" had been devised which achieved widespread popularity. It was STF (pronounced *stef*), which has remained in common usage among science fiction lovers until today.

However, an abbreviation of "science fiction," SF, is beginning to make inroads and may eventually supplant it. England saw the publication in 1955 of a book edited by Edmund Crispin, titled *Best sf* (lower case, no periods). The author's use of the full term "science fiction" inside the book indicates that both he and the publishers felt the abbreviation was commonly accepted. Judith Merril, in a 1956 American anthology, also used the contraction, but hyphenated it in the title of her volume *S-F.*

Oddly enough, technical difficulties may have contributed to the demise of "scientifiction." Unindoctrinated printers and copyreaders insist upon changing it to "scientification"—as, for instance, the late Joseph Henry Jackson learned when, at the instance of Anthony Boucher, he attempted to popularize the term in the early 1940's in the book department of the San Francisco *Chronicle.* Regularly it appeared as "scientification," and the *Chronicle* shortly shifted to the use of "science fiction." *

The term "scientific fiction" merely faded away until today its use assumes an antiquarian aspect.

Similarly, when a 1949 cover of *The Writer's Monthly* featured a review of "pseudo science" publication requirements, many of the newer writers weren't quite sure what was being referred to, so anachronistic had the term become.

"Super science" as an appellation for the field was never a strong contender as "the" term. Despite

*One more instance: The typist of Mr. Moskowitz' manuscript has almost invariably written "scientification" . . . and I wonder what F&SF's printers will have done.—A.B.

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the distinction of being a title twice, first for Popular's *Super Science Stories* and now for Crestwood's *Super Science Fiction,* its primary function is as a label for the more far-fetched forms of "space opera" dealing with movements of entire solar systems and disruptions on a galactic scale in the grand tradition of Edward E. Smith.

Williams and Wilkins attempted to establish FANTASCIENCE in 1934, when it published John Taine's novel *Before the Dawn,* but outside of being used in the title of Robert A. Madle's famous old fan magazine *Fantascience Digest* and at the head of a few fan columns, it never caught hold.*

If there is anything left to argue about, it is probably whether "science fiction" should be joined with a hyphen. When Hugo Gernsback reentered the science fiction field briefly with *Science-Fiction* + in 1953, the hyphen was deliberately inserted in "science-fiction" everywhere in the magazine to establish a different style. Production costs on this slick-paper experiment with five-color covers and no advertisements sank it after only seven issues, so it didn't last long enough to have any real influence. As recently as its May 12, 1956 number, however, *The Saturday Review* was still hyphenating "science-fiction."

For better or for worse, whether one likes it or not, accounts of high interplanetary adventure, jaunts into the future or past, visits to other dimensions or stories of the acquisition of superhuman physical and mental powers are tales of "science fiction." In the foreseeable future, no other term is likely to replace it.

*The short-lived (1954-1955) Italian edition of F&SF was titled *Fantascienza.* —A.B.

Look for the March issue of

Venture
SCIENCE FICTION

F&SF's new sister magazine, on sale January 10th
You'll find adventurous exciting novelets by
LEIGH BRACKETT and TOM GODWIN
And a powerful offbeat story by
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plus other thrilling bonus tales of science and suspense.

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It's with regret that we conclude this series of intimate glimpses of the Anglo-American-Russian first expedition to the Moon. Other adventures, equally enlightening and entertaining, must have befallen the crews of the Endeavour, *the* Goddard *and the* Ziolkovski; *and it's to be hoped that the British space captain may be prevailed upon to relate them, with the same detailed authenticity and gentle humor which you'll find in these two (for the time being) final episodes.*

Venture to the Moon

by ARTHUR C. CLARKE

V: WATCH THIS SPACE

IT WAS QUITE A SURPRISE TO DISCOVER, when I looked it up, that the most famous experiment we carried out while we were on the Moon had its beginnings way back in 1955. At that time, high altitude rocket research had been going for only about ten years, mostly at White Sands, New Mexico. 1955 was the date of one of the most spectacular of those early experiments, which involved the ejection of sodium onto the upper atmosphere.

On Earth, even on the clearest night, the sky between the stars isn't completely dark. There's a very faint background glow, and part of it is caused by the fluorescence of sodium atoms a hundred miles up. Since it would take the sodium in a good many cubic miles of the upper atmosphere to fill a single matchbox, it seemed to the early investigators that they could make quite a firework display if they used a rocket to dump a few pounds of the stuff into the ionosphere.

They were right. The sodium squirted out of a rocket above White Sands early in 1955 produced a great yellow glow in the sky which was visible, like a kind of artificial moonlight, for over an hour before the atoms dispersed. This experiment wasn't done for fun (though it *was* fun) but for a serious scientific purpose. Instruments trained on this glow were able to gather new knowledge which went into the stock-pile of

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information without which space-flight would never have been possible.

When they got to the Moon, the Americans decided that it would be a good idea to repeat the experiment there, on a much larger scale. A few hundred kilogrammes of sodium fired up from the surface would produce a display that would be visible from Earth, in a good pair of field-glasses, as it fluoresced its way up through the lunar atmosphere.

(Some people, by the way, still don't realise that the Moon *has* an atmosphere. It's about a million times too thin to be breathable, but if you have the right instruments you can detect it. As a meteor shield, it's first-rate, for though it may be tenuous it's hundreds of miles deep.)

Everyone had been talking about the experiment for days. The sodium bomb had arrived from Earth in the last supply rocket, and a very impressive piece of equipment it looked. Its operation was extremely simple; when ignited, an incendiary charge vaporised the sodium until a high pressure was built up, then a diaphragm burst and the stuff was squirted up into the sky through a specially shaped nozzle. It would be shot off soon after night-fall, and when the cloud of sodium rose out of the Moon's shadow into direct sunlight it would start to glow with tremendous brilliance.

Nightfall on the Moon is one of the most awe-inspiring sights in the whole of nature, made doubly so because as you watch the sun's flaming disc creep so slowly below the mountains you know that it will be fourteen days before you see it again. But it does not bring darkness—at least, not on this side of the Moon. There is always the Earth, hanging motionless in the sky, the one heavenly body that neither rises nor sets. The light pouring back from her clouds and seas floods the lunar landscape with a soft, blue-green radiance, so that it is often easier to find your way around at night than under the fierce glare of the sun.

Even those who were not supposed to be on duty had come out to watch the experiment. The sodium bomb had been placed at the middle of the big triangle formed by the three ships, and stood upright with its nozzle pointing at the stars. Dr Anderson, the astronomer of the American team, was testing the firing circuits, but everyone else was at a respectful distance. The bomb looked perfectly capable of living up to its name, though it was really about as dangerous as a soda-water syphon.

All the optical equipment of the three expeditions seemed to have been gathered together to record the performance. Telescopes, spectroscopes, motion picture cameras and everything else one could

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think of were lined up ready for action. And this, I knew, was nothing compared to the battery that must be zeroed on us from Earth. Every amateur astronomer who could see the Moon tonight would be standing by in his back garden, listening to the radio commentary which told him of the progress of the experiment. I glanced up at the gleaming planet that dominated the sky above me; the land areas seemed to be fairly free from cloud, so the folk at home should have a good view. That seemed only fair; after all, they were footing the bill.

There were still fifteen minutes to go. Not for the first time, I wished there was a reliable way of smoking a cigarette inside a space-suit without getting the helmet so badly fogged that you couldn't see. Our scientists had solved so many much more difficult problems; it seemed a pity that they couldn't do something about *that* one.

To pass the time—for this was an experiment where I had nothing to do—I switched on my suit radio and listened to Dave Bolton, who was making a very good job of the commentary. Dave was our chief navigator, and a brilliant mathematician. He also had a glib tongue and a picturesque turn of speech, and sometimes his recordings had to be censored by the B.B.C. There was nothing they could do about this one, however, for it was going out live on Earth.

Dave had finished a brief and lucid explanation of the purpose of the experiment, describing how the cloud of glowing sodium would enable us to analyse the lunar atmosphere as it rose through it at approximately a thousand miles an hour. "However," he went on to tell the waiting millions on Earth, "let's make one point clear. Even when the bomb has gone off, you won't see a darn thing for ten minutes—and neither will we. The sodium cloud will be completely invisible while it's rising up through the darkness of the Moon's shadow. Then, quite suddenly, it will flash into brilliance as it enters the sun's rays, which are streaming past over our heads right now as we stare up into space. No-one is quite sure how bright it will be, but it's a pretty safe guess that you'll be able to see it in any telescope bigger than a two-inch. So it should just be within the range of a good pair of binoculars."

He had to keep this sort of thing up for another ten minutes, and it was a marvel to me how he managed to do it. Then the great moment came, and Anderson closed the firing circuit. The bomb started to cook, building up pressure inside as the sodium volatilised. After thirty seconds, there was a sudden puff of smoke from the long, slender nozzle pointing up at the sky. And then we had to wait for another ten minutes while the invisible cloud rose to the stars. After

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all this build-up, I told myself, the result had better be good.

The seconds and minutes ebbed away. Then a sudden yellow glow began to spread across the sky, like a vast and unwavering aurora that became brighter even as we watched. It was as if an artist was sprawling strokes across the stars with a flame-filled brush. And as I stared at those strokes, I suddenly realised that someone had brought off the greatest advertising *coup* in history. For the strokes formed letters, and the letters formed two words—the name of a certain soft drink too well-known to need any further publicity from me.

How had it been done? The first answer was obvious. Someone had placed a suitable cut stencil in the nozzle of the sodium bomb, so that the stream of escaping vapour had shaped itself to the words. Since there was nothing to distort it, the pattern had kept its shape during its invisible ascent to the stars. I had seen sky-writing on Earth, but this was something on a far larger scale. Whatever I thought of them, I couldn't help admiring the ingenuity of the men who had perpetrated the scheme. The *O*'s and *A*'s had given them a bit of trouble, but the *C*'s and the *L* were perfect.

After the initial shock, I am glad to say that the scientific programme proceeded as planned. I wish I could remember how Dave Bolton rose to the occasion in his commentary; it must have been a strain even for his quick wits. By this time, of course, half the Earth could see what he was describing. The next morning, every newspaper on the planet carried that famous photo of the crescent Moon with the luminous slogan painted across its darkened sector.

The letters were visible, before they finally dispersed into space, for over an hour. By that time the words were almost a thousand miles long, and were beginning to get blurred. But they were still readable until they at last faded from sight in the ultimate vacuum between the planets.

Then the real fireworks began. Commander Vandenburg was absolutely furious, and promptly started to grill all his men. However, it was soon clear that the saboteur—if you could call him that—had been back on Earth. The bomb had been prepared there and shipped ready for immediate use. It did not take long to find, and fire, the engineer who had carried out the substitution. He couldn't care less, since his financial needs had been taken care of for a good many years to come.

As for the experiment itself, it was completely successful from the scientific point of view; all the recording instruments worked perfectly as they analysed the light from the unexpectedly shaped cloud. But we never let the Americans live it down, and I am afraid

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poor Captain Vandenburg was the one who suffered most. Before he came to the Moon he was a confirmed teetotal, and much of his refreshment came from a certain wasp-waisted bottle. But now, as a matter of principle, he can drink only beer—and he hates the stuff.

VI: A QUESTION OF RESIDENCE

I HAVE ALREADY DESCRIBED THE—shall we say—jockeying for position before takeoff on the first flight to the Moon. As it turned out, the American, Russian and British ships landed simultaneously. No-one has ever explained, however, why the British explorers came back nearly two weeks after the others.

Oh, I know the official story; I ought to, for I helped to concoct it. It is true as far as it goes, but it scarcely goes far enough.

On all counts, the joint expedition had been a triumphant success. There had been only one casualty, and in the manner of his death Vladimir Surov had made himself immortal. We had gathered knowledge which would keep the scientists of Earth busy for generations, and which would revolutionise almost all our ideas concerning the nature of the universe around us. Yes, our five months on the Moon had been well spent, and we would go home to such welcomes as few heroes had ever had before.

However, there was still a good deal of tidying up to be done. The instruments that had been scattered all over the lunar landscape were still busily recording, and much of the information they gathered could not be automatically radioed back to Earth. There was no point in all three of the expeditions staying on the Moon to the last minute; the personnel of one would be sufficient to finish the job. But who would volunteer to be caretaker while the others went back to gain the glory? It was a difficult problem, but one that would have to be solved very soon.

As far as supplies were concerned, we had little to worry about. The automatic freight rockets could keep us provided with air, food and water for as long as we wished to stay on the Moon. We were all in good health, though a little tired. None of the anticipated psychological troubles had cropped up, perhaps because we had all been so busy on tasks of absorbing interest that we had had no time to worry about going crazy. But, of course, we all looked forward to getting back to Earth and seeing our families again.

The first change of plan was forced upon us by the *Ziolkovski's* being put out of commission, when

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the ground beneath one of her landing legs suddenly gave way. The ship managed to stay upright, but the hull was badly twisted and the pressure cabin sprang dozens of leaks. There was much debate about on-the-spot repairs, but it was decided that it would be far too risky for her to take off in this condition. The Russians had no alternative but to thumb lifts back in the *Goddard* and the *Endeavour;* by using the *Ziolkovski's* unwanted fuel, our ships would be able to manage the extra load. However, the return flight would be extremely cramped and uncomfortable for all concerned as everyone would have to eat and sleep in shifts.

Either the American or the British ship, therefore, would be the first back to Earth. During those final weeks, as the work of the expedition was brought to its close, relations between Commander Vandenburg and myself were somewhat strained. I even wondered if we ought to settle the matter by tossing for it. . . .

Another problem was also engaging my attention—that of crew discipline. Perhaps this is too strong a phrase; I would not like it to be thought that a mutiny ever seemed probable. But all my men were now a little abstracted and liable to be found, if off-duty, scribbling furiously in corners. I knew exactly what was going on, for I was involved in it myself. There wasn't a human being on the Moon who had not sold exclusive rights to some newspaper or magazine, and we were all haunted by approaching deadlines. The radio-teletype to Earth was in continuous operation, sending tens of thousands of words a day, while even larger slabs of deathless prose were being dictated over the speech circuits.

It was Professor Williams, our very practically minded astronomer, who came to me one day with the answer to my main problem.

"Skipper," he said, balancing himself precariously on the all-too-collapsible table I used as my working desk inside the igloo, "there's no technical reason, is there, why we should get back to Earth first?"

"No," I said, "merely a matter of fame, fortune and seeing our families again. But I admit those aren't technical reasons. We could stay here another year if Earth kept sending supplies. If you want to suggest that, however, I shall take great pleasure in strangling you."

"It's not as bad as that. Once the main body has gone back, whichever party is left can follow in two or three weeks at the latest. They'll get a lot of credit, in fact, for self-sacrifice, modesty and similar virtues."

"Which will be very poor compensation for being second home."

"Right—we need something else to make it worth while. Some more material reward."

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"Agreed. What do you suggest?"

Williams pointed to the calendar hanging on the wall in front of me, between the two pin-ups we had stolen from the *Goddard*. The length of our stay was indicated by the days that had been crossed off in red ink; a big question mark in two weeks' time showed when the first ship would be heading back to Earth.

"There's your answer," he said. "If we go back then, do you realise what will happen? I'll tell you."

He did, and I kicked myself for not having thought of it first.

The next day, I explained my decision to Vandenburg and Krasnin.

"We'll stay behind and do the mopping-up," I said. "It's a matter of common sense. The *Goddard's* a much bigger ship than ours and can carry an extra four people, while we can only manage two more, and even then it will be a squeeze. If you go first, Van, it will save a lot of people eating their hearts out here for longer than necessary."

"That's very big of you," replied Vandenburg. "I won't hide the fact that we'll be happy to get home. And it's logical, I admit, now that the *Ziolkovski's* out of action. Still, it means quite a sacrifice on your part, and I don't really like to take advantage of it."

I gave an expansive wave.

"Think nothing of it," I answered. "As long as you boys don't grab all the credit, we'll take our turn. After all, we'll have the show here to ourselves when you've gone back to Earth."

Krasnin was looking at me with a rather calculating expression, and I found it singularly difficult to return his gaze.

"I hate to sound cynical," he said, "but I've learned to be a little suspicious when people start doing big favours without very good reasons. And frankly, I don't think the reason you've given is good enough. You wouldn't have anything else up your sleeve, would you?"

"Oh, very well," I sighed. "I'd hoped to get a *little* credit, but I see it's no use trying to convince anyone of the purity of my motives. I've got a reason, and you might as well know it. But please don't spread it around; I'd hate the folks back on Earth to be disillusioned. They still think of us as noble and heroic seekers after knowledge; let's keep it that way, for all our sakes."

Then I pulled out the calendar, and explained to Vandenburg and Krasnin what Williams had already explained to me. They listened with scepticism, then with growing sympathy.

"I had no idea it was *that* bad," said Vandenburg at last.

"Americans never have," I said sadly. "Anyway, that's the way it's been for half a century, and it doesn't seem to get any better. So

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you agree with my suggestion?"

"Of course. It suits us fine, anyhow. Until the next expedition's ready, the Moon's all yours."

I remembered that phrase, two weeks later, as I watched the *Goddard* blast up into the sky towards the distant, beckoning Earth. It was lonely, then, when the Americans and all but two of the Russians had gone. We envied them the reception they got, and watched jealously on the TV screens their triumphant processions through Moscow and New York. Then we went back to work, and bided our time. Whenever we felt depressed, we would do little sums on bits of paper and would be instantly restored to cheerfulness.

The red crosses marched across the calendar as the short terrestrial days went by—days which seemed to have very little connexion with the slow cycle of lunar time. At last we were ready; all the instrument readings were taken, all the specimens and samples safely packed away aboard the ship. The motors roared into life, giving us for a moment the weight we would feel again when we were back in Earth's gravity. Below us the rugged lunar landscape, which we had grown to know so well, fell swiftly away; within seconds we could see no sign at all of the buildings and instruments we had so laboriously erected and which future explorers would one day use.

The homeward voyage had begun; we returned to Earth in uneventful discomfort, joined the already half-dismantled *Goddard* beside Space Station Three, and were quickly ferried down to the world we had left seven months before.

Seven months: that, as Williams had pointed out, was the all-important figure. We had been on the Moon for more than half a financial year—and for all of us, it had been the most profitable year of our lives.

Sooner or later, I suppose, this interplanetary loophole will be plugged; the Department of Inland Revenue is still fighting a gallant rearguard action, but we seem neatly covered under Section 57, paragraph 8 of the Capital Gains Act of 1972. We wrote our books and articles on the Moon—and until there's a lunar government to impose income tax, we're hanging on to every penny.

And if the ruling finally goes against us—well, there's always Mars. . . .

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G. C. Edmondson has a dry, terse, individual manner — sometimes so dry, indeed, as to seem virtually dehydrated. For what he drily offers us here as a short story is, in plot, incidents and action, a complete science fiction adventure novel condensed into a few pages of breathless breakneck movement.

The Inferlab Project

by G. C. EDMONDSON

THE LIGHT TURNED ON AS I OPENED the door of my apartment. The TV started up in the middle of a weather report. "There will be point zero five inches of rain in all urban areas between eleven thirty and midnight." I turned it off and the screen became a landscape. I dialed a drink and a meal.

The martini was dry and dinner wasn't bad. People had gotten pretty tired of yeast when meat production went down. The sterility plague hadn't affected cattle and swine as much as it had humans but it was bad enough. Things had improved when a Hawaiian named Yoshita learned to force-feed abalones in a high nutrient salt water bath. They grew so fast and tender they didn't need pounding.

I turned on the TV again. Wrestling. I gave up and punched the bed button. It opened and the kitchen started folding up in the wall. I was standing in the middle of the apartment, trying not to get snagged, when the door buzzed. I opened it to a couple of characters I immediately christened Mutt and Jeff.

"Doctor Stillman sent us," Mutt said.

Jeff didn't say anything.

I grabbed a hat and went with them. It was clouding up for the eleven thirty rain and I stumbled in the dark. Each one grabbed an elbow and helped me into the car.

The tall one drove. Just a job so far as he was concerned. They both must have thought so or I'd have been in the middle instead of next to the door.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"Stillman's house," Mutt said.

"This isn't the way to Stillman's house."

"Shut up." Jeff spoke for the first time.

I didn't like his tone of voice. I eased my elbow over the latch. The limousine slowed down for a left turn and I rolled out into the gut-

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ter. I was on my feet, flagtailing up an alley before it could start hurting.

The car slammed into reverse and one of them sprayed a few shots after me. He didn't have much chance of hitting me in the dark. Still, I'd never been shot at before. It's uncomfortable. I stumbled into some kind of basement doorway and dived in. The driver turned into the alley. I could see a spotlight busily turning night into day as I shut the door.

"In kind of a hurry, aren't you?" somebody said mildly.

When I dived through the door I'd gotten an impression of an empty basement. Now I could see it wasn't empty. Fifteen or twenty people were looking at me in not particularly surprised attitudes. One of them bolted the door I'd just come through.

"Thanks," I said. "Who are you?"

"In all fairness, I believe you should speak first." He waved at a chair and I sat before a plastic-covered table. He started rolling a brown paper cigarette. A ramshackle bar lined the opposite side of the room. Over the bar a low-wattage fluorescent gleamed, attracting moths, flies, and a sympathetic glow from the bartender's fine head of skin. My interrogator sat down and the others crowded around. A blowsy woman with a pekinese in her arms got up from the bar and waddled an invisible chalk line toward us. The others moved aside deferentially and she took the third chair.

"Welcome to the Blue Moon," she said with an expansive gesture. "We ask no questions. Of course, if you want conversation . . ."

I thought it over for a minute. Could I tell them? One thing was sure. I was going to need help. I decided to level.

The bartender's scalp flashed as he brought me a shot glass. I swallowed it and subconsciously noted what the higher esters of alcohol were doing to my gastric secretions. A good M.D. never calls them fusel oil. The blowsy woman caressed the pekinese and watched me.

"You look kind of scratched up," she ventured.

"I'm not used to leaving cars on the fly."

"What's the heat on you for?"

"I'm a doctor and I found a cure for sterility."

"No kidding?" It was the short man who had bolted the door. "You ought to be a hero."

"That's what I thought until I found out it isn't a disease."

"What is it?" the woman asked.

"Somebody's doing it. Who or why I don't know but they've wormed their way into the government." I kept wondering which side my audience was on. "I've got to get to somebody higher up," I concluded.

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"Well, doc, the big wheels don't ever come around to see old Bella any more." She sighed and patted her pekinese.

I looked around. None of the women were wearing padded fronts to their dresses.

"I hate children," Bella said flatly. "Hated the little monsters while they were around. Ain't changed my mind since the last one grew up."

"Your dog's getting pretty old," I said.

"That's different. I'd give anything for a litter of pups." She caressed the peke. "Poor old girl, she's lonely."

I guess it all started when I got sprung. After three years Uncle decided I'd drunk my share of coffee and prescribed my share of codeine pills. There I stood, honorable discharge in hand, and twenty-seven years of my life already gone. I looked through the *Medical Journal* and thought of buying a practice somewhere. Then I saw how much they cost. The next step was coming back to earth and taking a job with Inferlab. They ran a blind ad.

There was a lot of writing to a box number and finally, after a month of playing post office, I got invited to drop around and "Meet the gang."

The head gangster was kindly white-haired old Doctor Stillman. That's all there was to say about Doc Stillman unless you wanted to add short, fat, puffy, blue-eyed, bushy-eyebrowed old Doctor Stillman. He wasn't a bad joe though.

A vestal virgin in starched petticoats and white stockings dropped the barrier and he was up like a jackrabbit and around the desk, pumping my hand.

"Good afternoon, sir," I said.

"Delighted to know you. Delighted. Come along, I'll show you the plant." He took an arm and steered me back past the aging vestal. We went through a maze of plumber's nightmares in glass. I shook fifteen hundred hands and didn't quite catch fifteen hundred names. Halfway through, we stood watching a girl wearing a dirty white smock over street clothes. The smock hung like a becalmed mains'l. When she turned around I recognized her.

"Well hi!" she said. "I haven't seen you since pre-med."

I shook another hand and this time I didn't have to strain for the name. "What's new?" I asked.

"Miss Goldfinch is one of our best virologists," Doctor Stillman volunteered. "Come to think of it, that's your line, isn't it, doctor?"

I nodded.

"Well, you and Doctor Goldfinch will have to get together." He was positively beaming.

We tore ourselves away from Nightmare Alice and finished the tour. Stillman waved me into a low chair.

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"Well, doctor," he said, "You've looked us over."

"Very interesting place you have here."

He opened a folder. "William Cotton, M.D. Born Newark, 1952. That makes you twenty-eight, doesn't it?"

I nodded again.

"Interned Los Angeles County. Three years Army Med. Corps. Service Baffin Island. Must be nice to see civilization again," he said.

"We had all the comforts of home."

"All?" He raised bushy white eyebrows.

"VD incidence in enlisted personnel was comparable with that of stateside duty stations."

"Times have changed since I was in the army. Well." He was suddenly businesslike. "Are you familiar with our research?"

"Only what I read in the papers."

"That's the whole story. No secrets. No hired assassins breathing down your neck."

"That's nice. What are you actually doing?"

"Infertility research. As you know, we operate from voluntary contributions. I might add that contributions have increased nicely this last year."

I'll just bet they had! Ten years ago the birth rate began dropping. With the war over and world government a reality we should have been headed for a golden age. There was only one snag. The golden age was tailored for sixteen billions. When the population topped thirty the golden era began turning green around the edges.

When it started, editors went into rhapsodies on page four. That was the first year. The second year it dropped a little lower and toy manufacturers, pediatricians, and a few million others directly dependent on children decided not to put in that swimming pool after all. The third year no child was born. When Doc Stillman set up Inferlab he had no financial troubles.

"I'll ask Miss Goldfinch to help you get settled," he was saying. "When you've decided what you need give me the list."

"Will I get it?"

"The sky's the limit," Stillman beamed.

Next morning I looked up Doctor Goldfinch. I wondered if her nickname had followed her.

"Hi," she said with a snaggle-toothed smile. "Ready to go?"

I nodded. "Stillman said to look you up."

"How much room will you need?"

"How long is a piece of string?"

She laughed. "Coffee time. I'll show you a short cut to the cafeteria." She got out of the smock.

With marvelous illogicality women's styles now featured a padded abdomen. As soon as women couldn't get a bulge in the proper place they all wanted one. On Miss Goldfinch it looked like a marble

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taped to a soda straw. She ran a comb through mousy hair and looked at a mirror. "What's the use?" she said. We both laughed.

In a couple of weeks we were in the habit of lunching together. "Miss Goldfinch," I asked, "have you ever wondered who pinned that awful name on you in college?"

"I have a pretty good idea. Have you ever wondered who transmuted William Cotton into Flannelmouth Bill?" I stared at her and we both laughed again.

"Alice, I've been reading these reports. Doesn't anybody accomplish anything around here?"

"You know research. It takes just as long to prove you're wrong as it does to prove you're right."

"And you're wrong a lot oftener," I finished. "But isn't there any coordination here? Half the people are working on problems the other half solved years ago."

I took space next to Alice's and we knocked out the wall between us. The more I read the more wrong things looked. It didn't look like a virus at all. It looked a lot simpler. I went around to biology and drew a pair of rhesus monkeys and a dozen hamsters. Three months later I knew what was causing infertility. I went to Doctor Stillman's office.

When I finished talking Doc Stillman wasn't beaming.

"Have you told anyone else about this?" he asked.

"It sounded too crazy. I didn't want to get laughed at."

"It's a good thing you didn't," he said grimly. "The whole government must be infiltrated. God knows what would have happened if it got to one of *them* first."

"Who are they?"

"I don't know. Enemy agents, of course, but who's the enemy?"

"Extraterrestrial?" I said hopefully.

"The Martian expedition didn't even have a ruin to show for all their trouble."

"The universe is bigger than the Moon and Mars."

He ran gnarled fingers through bushy hair. "We mustn't discount the possibility," he conceded. "But that isn't our job. The problem is: Whom can we tell?"

"How about letters to every editor in the world?"

"And start a panic? Besides, with their organization it'd be a cinch to stop us. Why, there must be millions of them!"

"What *can* we do?" I asked.

"I've got a friend—school chum. High in the government. He'll know." He paused. "You go home and don't say a word to anyone. I'll see him tonight."

"Why not phone him?"

"May be tapped. Remember, not a word."

"All right." I nodded uncertainly and went out. And that was why a fine, respectable young M.D. happened to get taken for a ride.

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Bella and her flock were still watching me—hanging on every word.

"Those goons are probably still patrolling the neighborhood," I said. "I've got to get out of here."

She gestured at the man who'd locked the door. "Take care of it, Tris."

Tris nodded and an ash fell into the dregs of his beer with a little hissing sound. He got up and disappeared. In a few minutes he came back with a furniture-moving pad. He unrolled it on the floor and motioned me in. "If you aren't too proud to impersonate a Chippendale."

They rolled me up and I felt myself being lifted and carried out. I jolted around for a while in the back of the van then it stopped.

"You might as well ride in the cab now," Tris said. "We're out of the neighborhood."

"Is your name really Tristram?" I asked.

"Yeah," he grinned bashfully.

"You work for a moving outfit?"

"No. This stuff is TV props. I rent them to studios."

"No kidding? I'll bet you could get me some tickets."

"Any time, Doc." Tris grinned.

"Where are we?" The rain was over but it was still too cloudy to see.

"Downtown. Any place you want to go?" He rolled a brown paper cigarette with one hand.

I couldn't go back to the apartment. They'd be waiting there for sure. Evidently, Doctor Stillman's friend wasn't so true-blue after all so the Doc's place was out. I got an idea. "Got a directory?" I asked Tris.

"Under the phone." He pointed to the ledge behind the seat. I looked up an address.

"Can you drop me at 211 East 72d?" I asked.

"No trouble at all." He turned at the corner. When we got to 72d he slowed to a crawl and I dropped out. I was getting good at it. I went into the building and started counting doors. I found the right one and turned the knob. It opened an inch before the chain reached its limit. It was enough to turn the light on.

"Who is it?" a voice called sleepily.

"Nightmare Alice?"

She opened the door in a hurry. "Flannelmouth! What're you doing here?"

I ducked in and shut the door. I stared at her. In a nightgown she wasn't half bad. She reached for a negligee. "If you're planning criminal assault there are easier ways."

"Alice, I'm in trouble."

"Husband or father?"

"Quit kidding, I'm serious." I told her the story.

She whistled when I was finished. "You won't be able to stay here very long," she said.

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"I know. I took a chance that they'd need a little while to figure this stop out. I'll blow and cover my tracks or else you'll be in it too."

"I am anyhow. Better tell me how to do it before you go. If you don't show up again I'd like to pass the information on."

"That's why I came. It's simple. So simple nobody ever thought to look for it. Or if anybody did there was always somebody around to talk him off on another wild goose chase."

"In one word—how?"

"Distil your own drinking water. Don't smoke. They're loaded with oral contraceptive. I've found it in bread, fish, and milk so far. Run off your own analyses. Better not do it in the plant though. We seem to have a few Greeks inside our horse. Well, sorry. Got to run."

She nodded soberly. "Take care of yourself, Flannelmouth."

It's funny what a little excitement can do for the glandular system. Before I knew it there I was, kissing Nightmare Alice. I trotted out into the street, considerably shaken.

A light flashed at the corner. I flopped down and tried to make like a drunk, sleeping it off. The car turned up my block. It stopped and somebody got out. From the corner of my eye I could see a square-toed shoe. Cops. He reached down to shake me and I sat up.

"Any identification?" he asked.

"I'm Dr. William Cotton." He'd have found out anyway.

In practically no time I was in a precinct house. In even less time I was on the roof and into a copter. Then I was on a rocket for the Capitol. A copter met us and I was rushed into a small building I'd never heard of before. Doc Stillman was on hand to greet me.

"We'll see the President in a few minutes," he said.

While I was wondering how he made it so quick a light flashed over a door. A man in blue serge looked up from his newspaper long enough to say, "You can go in now."

We went in and met the great man. He needed a shave and some sleep but, for that matter, so did I. Maybe we both looked better on TV.

He greeted Doc Stillman as an old friend. "So you're the young man who found it?" he said to me.

I gave him an idiotic grin and said, "Yes, I'm the one."

The President put his hands together and studied his fingertips as if he'd never seen them before. I looked at Doc Stillman but he had just discovered his own fingers.

"Doctor Cotton," the President finally said, "your discovery comes at a most inopportune time."

I looked at him.

"To tell the truth, we have suspected something of this sort for quite a while."

"I don't see how the Inferlab peo-

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ple could have missed it unless somebody was deliberately sending them on wild goose chases." I stopped. You could almost see the light bulb exploding over my head like it used to do in the funnies. The President and Doc Stillman were both looking at me silently.

"So that's the way it is?" I said.

The President nodded. "Who else knows about this?" he asked.

I'll admit it took a while but when I started thinking I did a lot of it in a hurry.

"I wrote some *to be opened in event of my death or disappearance* letters just after I ditched those two hoods. Incidentally, were they yours?" I asked Stillman.

He rediscovered his fingers. The President was frowning. I got another idea.

"By a strange coincidence I ran across a mimeograph. Very handy if you want to write a lot of letters in a hurry."

The President frowned some more and went into conference with himself for thirty seconds.

"We seem to have reached an impasse, Doctor," he said. "We could probably run down those letters of yours but they have a certain nuisance value. As you may have guessed, we are influential. There is an ancient political axiom concerning the advisability of allying oneself with the invincible."

"One question."

He raised his eyebrows.

"Why?"

Stillman forgot his fingers for a moment. "We're working for humanity," he said sanctimoniously.

"I'll be brief," the President said, "War is a thing of the past. There is no enemy to be crushed by sheer weight of population. Young as you are, you must remember a day when earth had fewer children—when there was breathing room. Humanity has grown wild for thousands of generations. In any civilization less than global such growth was necessary. Now it is not."

"And you're going to weed the garden?" I asked.

"Someone has to do it."

"How did you select the progenitors of this future utopia?"

The President shrugged.

"Another proverb?" I asked. "Something about politics making strange bedfellows?" Stillman was looking at me as if I'd flatulated in church.

"Have you a better plan?" the President asked.

He had me there. Any honest geneticist would admit politicians as a class are as representative a cross section as scientists—or bums.

"What's in it for me?" I asked.

"Why not let him discover the cure?" Stillman asked.

"A brilliant idea," the President said. "In a year or two your researches can lead to a method of inducing fertility. Of course, the drugs must be rare and within reach of the financially responsible

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only. Wealth and fame will be yours."

"And women, too," Stillman chipped in with a non-clinical leer.

"You've got yourself a deal," I said. The President and I shook hands. He stuck his in his pocket and absently wiped it against the lining. I used a hankie.

I got to work late the next day. Alice was moping over coffee when I walked into the cafeteria. I went through the line and picked up two trays of fried sugar-cured abalone and ersatz eggs. She nearly jumped out of her skin when I set the trays in front of her.

"Thanks," she said. "Now I'm hungry. What's new?"

"Nothing. Heard a new joke. I'll tell it to you some day when there are no ladies present."

"Hah!" she said. We tore into the eggs.

Up in the cubicle we closed the doors and hung a DO NOT ENTER WITHOUT PROTECTIVE CLOTHING AND RESPIRATOR card on them. Alice started making noises with bottles and I went to the blackboard.

"Seen any TV programs lately?" I asked.

"Not around here," she said so I guessed it was safe. I wrote, "Did anybody connect you with me last night?" and she nodded a *no*. We kept chattering about one thing and another while I scribbled as much of the story as I could. We started looking for microphones and cameras. We didn't find any but that was no proof they weren't there. They could have been poured in the cement when the building went up for all I knew.

We kept busy on the blackboard and decided it would be safer if we didn't see each other outside of working hours. It wouldn't be wise for people to know how intimate we were.

The boys and girls of Inferlab went their merry ways chasing their separate geese for three more weeks. I spilled sugar in odd places about my apartment and it was usually disturbed when I came back. Let them look. One thing I could be sure of, they'd never find those lettters or even guess where I sent them. It's hard to find something that doesn't exist. I felt I was avenging in some small way the virus hunters of Inferlab.

I mailed myself letters from various boxes around town. They were all sealed a little differently when I got them. I took to writing limericks to the hawkshaws that opened them. Meanwhile, I worried. I wanted to talk to Alice and I wanted to see Bella and the Blue Moon again. One day I got an idea. I sent Alice to the Blue Moon via the blackboard.

Next morning she scribbled "Mission accomplished" and rubbed it out as soon as I saw it. I sneaked a kiss before opening the door. Even without excitement it was nice.

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I wrote a personal message on the blackboard. Alice read it and nodded. I got out the PROTECTIVE CLOTHING signs again.

Later that day I stepped out into the street in front of Inferlab. There were four or five hot little cars parked in a group with their engines running. Near them a furniture van idled as its driver struggled with the pages of a street map. Suddenly there was an explosion. The bomb burst in the middle of the street with a lot of noise but nobody seemed hurt. Clouds of smoke billowed from it and practically instantly the street was blanketed. I ran.

When the smoke cleared the five little hot cars screamed away in five separate directions. My gumshoes tore their hair and screamed even louder, following them. When the last hawkshaw had left the neighborhood the van driver finally got his map folded. He goosed the turbine and moved away slowly. After a mile or so he stopped again and let me out. I rode the rest of the way to the Blue Moon in the cab.

Bella and Tris heard me out. "It ain't going to be easy, rounding up thirty or forty girls on short notice," Bella said. "This must be some party you're planning."

"A party to end all parties," I said.

Tris grinned. Bella gave me a knowing look and mumbled something about doctors being more fun than anybody. I wondered if she knew Nightmare Alice was a doctor.

We settled things and Tris loaded me in the van again. He dumped me on a quiet street not too far from Inferlab and I strolled back into the building and right past some hard and cold looks. None of the hawkshaws opened their mouths though. "Fine restaurant down the street," I said loudly. "Ought to serve food like that in this cafeteria." I shut out four glares with the elevator doors.

Time dragged.

One day I cornered Stillman in a hall. "Can we talk?" I asked. He shook his head and walked on. When we were as far as possible from a lighting fixture he nodded.

"I've been faking data for nine months. I'll be ready to spring it in about three more weeks. Can you arrange worldwide TV coverage?"

"I'll take care of it," he said.

"Make sure the President's there. I want to do it up good."

He nodded and walked on.

Alice and I had endless conferences at the blackboard. We scribbled harder and faster than a couple of G.P.'s prescribing placebos. Got to be pretty good at lip reading, too.

The great day came and I stood on stage, peeking through the curtain. The first four rows of the audience were solid women.

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"Counting the house, doctor?" the President asked with heavy geniality.

"I just want to make sure there's no slip-up. This is a big day for me."

"You'll be well rewarded," he said.

"I'm sure we all will be," I answered.

A little man with headphones rushed around like a chicken taking shock treatments, pushing everybody in place. "Remember, this is worldwide," he kept saying. A camera boom swung into place. The curtains opened.

My voice was two octaves above normal and my knees were shaking but I didn't have any reputation to preserve. I looked straight into the lens and started my spiel:

"Before I begin, would you ladies in the first four rows of the studio audience please come on stage?" There was a rumbling mumble from the audience and the President frowned nervously.

"This isn't the way we rehearsed it," the little man was hissing from the wings. Meanwhile, the ladies climbed the stairs up onto the stage.

"Now ladies, if you please." I tried to make a theatrical flourish.

The girls raised their skirts and a few million bluenoses fainted here and there throughout Christendom. The only reaction in the studio was a gasp, then wild applause as the ladies discovered forty beautifully bulging abdomina. And they weren't padding.

"I'll turn it over to the President now, Mr. President!" I stepped aside and waved him to the mike. He looked daggers at me and began extemporizing a speech.

Doc Stillman and a half dozen hoods began edging toward me from the wings. I stepped up close beside the President and stood a little behind him, beaming into the camera like a martyred child saint while I kept my right index finger jabbed in his back. The president ran a finger around his collar and changed the tone of his speech. I began to catch phrases like "Due to the fearless and tradition-breaking researches of Doctor Cotton." Here he put an affectionate arm around my shoulders and tried to ease me in front of him. I jabbed my finger a little harder into his left kidney and he relaxed and said something about "new, inexpensive treatment." The hoods couldn't see what I had in my hand but they got the president's message and started backing off. "Will be added immediately to water supplies throughout the world." It was all true except he meant remove instead of add.

I'll admit, he made a good recovery. In ten minutes of round, pear-shaped tones he gave a blow by blow of how the Inferlab team had found a cure. When it was over he turned to me with blood in his eye. Doc Stillman was closing in from the other side.

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"I wouldn't if I were you. This time I really did mimeograph a few letters. They're very explicit on how to analyze water. If I disappear and any of those letters are opened your collective names will be thin mud—the liquidated kind."

Tris and Bella came over.

"I see you fixed me up with a few tickets. Thanks," I said. Tris grinned like a happy leprechaun. Bella had a basket in her arms.

"Look!" She uncovered the basket. Six puppies crawled over her peke, blue eyes myopically seeking nipples. Alice ambled over from where she'd been indecently exposing herself to the world at large.

"By the way, Mr. President, have you met my wife?" I asked.

He managed a sickly smile and bent over Nightmare Alice's hand.

"You've done a great job, doctor," I said to Alice. "Your devotion to science shall not go unrewarded."

"Science shmience," Alice said. "Anything to get a man."

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot

Soon after *A Budget of Musings Afloat and Ashore,* by 'An Old Salt,' appeared in 3412, Vice-Admiral Sir Trumpery Buckett invited Ferdinand Feghoot to visit the 18th Century and meet Madame Pompadour. Though his manner seemed odd, Feghoot accepted; and they left via the) (at the Time Travellers Club.

To Feghoot's surprise, they emerged not in France, but on a dark London street where a mob was storming and roaring.

"Feghoot," Sir Trumpery gloated, *"I have trapped you.* That was *my* book you reviewed. You called it 'a slop-chest of motheaten jottings, a dull, ill-assorted olla podrida.' Well—" He pointed at the oncoming mob. "—here's my revenge! These are the Gordon Riots, my boy—the zenith of British anti-Catholicism. You have boasted that nothing can force you to utter a bigoted word against any religion. Ha! You will now . . . if you want to survive!" And he roared with laughter.

"DOWN WITH PRIESTS! PAPISTS GO HOME!" the mob bellowed.

A huge Scotsman came up, brandishing billhook and torch—and Feghoot at once began yelling as loudly as anyone else.

"I *thought* so," Sir Trumpery sneered. "This will make a fine story."

"But I'm not against any religion—I'm denouncing your miserable book! NO POTPOURRI!" shouted Ferdinand Feghoot.

GRENDEL BRIARTON

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

"SCIENCE FICTION SALES ARE ZOOMING up."

That welcome and not unsurprising statement comes not from a wishfully thinking fan-magazine, nor from a magazine editor trying to impress his rivals (without mentioning exact figures), but from *Inside Bantam,* the monthly trade-news release of Bantam Books, which is intended not to impress the public but to inform the book trade. Four times in 15 months a science fiction or fantasy book led Bantam's cross-check of 10-day sales figures, over a strong list of mystery, western and general titles; and one can only hope that this presages a more widespread revival of interest . . . and of purchases.

The earlier Bantam s.f. leaders were Wilson Tucker's MAN FROM TOMORROW (WILD TALENT) and TIME X (THE SCIENCE FICTION SUBTREASURY) and C. M. Kornbluth's NOT THIS AUGUST. The latest—not precisely science fiction, but closely related fantasy—is an anthology edited by Ray Bradbury and entitled THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO AND OTHER IMPROBABLE STORIES (Bantam, 35¢).

The 10 short stories in the volume, a group equal in length to the average s.f. magazine, are an interesting and varied lot, none of them previously anthologized. Mostly from slick magazines or hardcover books (though with 2 from *Unknown Worlds,* including a fine neglected Kuttner demon story), they run from E. B. White's delightful satiric glimpse of a companionable robot to a deeply moving spiritual fantasy of Indian archeology by Oliver LaFarge, with distinguished entries by Shirley Jackson, Robert M. Coates and others—in all, an off-trail, highly personalized collection of shorts which would in itself be worth the price.

But the "other improbable stories" are insignificant beside the short novel by Charles G. Finney which gives the book its title. THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO was first published (by Viking) in 1935 and reprinted (Abramson) in 1945. Both editions were small, and THE CIRCUS has long been one of the scarcest and most desirable items in the fantasy rare book trade. It has been my impression for over 20 years that this is the greatest work

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of fantasy fiction yet produced in America; and my latest rereading, in this volume which contains the complete text (plus the wondrous appendices, if minus the equally wondrous Artzybasheff drawings), convinces me that it is, if possible, even better than I had previously believed.

As I said a few months ago in discussing J. R. R. Tolkien, it's exceedingly difficult for a reviewer to indicate satisfactorily the distinction between the very-good-and-strongly-to-be-recommended-this-season and the absolutely, *sub specie aeternitatis* great. Mr. Finney's novel is simply the plotless story of how a circus (including a satyr, a sphinx, a sea serpent, Apollonius of Tyana and the great god Wottle) played the small town of Abalone, Ariz.—and in its simplicity it casually offers statements and suggestions of extraordinary depth and scope concerning beauty and religion and love and sex and knowledge and man's relation to all these. It is a funny book, a charming book, a wise book, a terrible book, a beautiful book; and this department has never, in over seven years, had occasion to recommend a book so urgently.

The Bradbury collection is not Shirley Jackson's only recent anthology appearance. She is represented in Martha Foley's THE BEST AMERICAN SHORT STORIES: 1956* (Houghton Mifflin, $4) by *One Ordinary Day, with Peanuts* (F&SF, January, 1955), marking this story's third anthologization, and the second successive year in which F&SF is honored in the Foley BEST.

Jack Vance's first adult science fiction novel, TO LIVE FOREVER (Ballantine, $2.75*; paper, 35¢), is not wholly successful, but when it does succeed it's as exciting as anything this none-too-rewarding year has brought forth in this field. This is s.f. in the grand manner: intricate melodrama rousingly played against the elaborate background of a curiously conceived future society. Man has achieved the possibility of immortality; but for obvious Malthusian reasons this boon (if such it be) cannot be conferred upon all, and men are ranged by achievement in five classes, from those who die (if not naturally, then forcibly) around 80, to the immortal (and many-bodied) Amaranths. The story's hero-villain is a brilliant sharpy, conniving and killing his way through society to immortality. Logic and characterization falter at moments, and the book's self-consistency does not always bear close examination; but the action is forceful, the ideas and visualization vivid.

Raymond F. Jones's THE SECRET PEOPLE* (Avalon, $2.50) worries about population too—not, however, to limit its numbers, but to establish a strict genetic control to maintain the purity of the species after atomic war. Some of the suppressed deviations are beneficent;

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and a hidden race of telepaths develops, which must eventually decide whether to aid, abandon or destroy the normal human beings of the world. It's a capable enough book, but familiar in concepts and somewhat lifeless in the telling—a marked disappointment from the author of RENAISSANCE and SON OF THE STARS.

I suppose Felix Morley's GUMPTION ISLAND* (Caxton, $5) is science fiction if it is any kind of fiction at all, even though its science runs to such statements as "All stars look round through a telescope." It tells of a Russian superbomb which warps space-time and zooms a Chesapeake Bay island back 50,000,000 years to the Mesozoic era, where the heroic transportees demonstrate their fitness for survival by reestablishing the gold standard, introducing a flat 10% income tax, and keeping the island's Negroes in their place. The amateur novelist often has a sort of charm denied to professionals (as Mr. Morley's brother Frank ably demonstrated in DEATH IN DWELLY LANE); and there are adumbrations of that charm here. But the book is primarily a politico-economic tract, and one whose arguments will appeal only to those who, deeming the Republican Party a dangerous left-wing organization, voted for T. Coleman Andrews last November.

For completeness, I should belatedly mention two s.f. novels published as straight fiction early in 1956: Guy Richards' TWO RUBLES TO TIMES SQUARE* (Duell, Sloan & Pearce-Little, Brown, $3.50) and Martin Caidin's THE LONG NIGHT* (Dodd, Mead, $3). The Richards book has at least a good basic idea, a clever switch on the Russian-invasion theme, but the author lacks the wit, the knowledge and the technique to develop it even passably. The Caidin covers precisely the same ground as Philip Wylie's TOMORROW!; and the havoc wrought by its A-bomb is nothing to the devastation visited by Mr. Caidin upon the English language. (A sentence that particularly haunts me is, "Too weary to attempt subterfuge, John relied again on a false story to gain entrance.")

Alexander Lernet-Holenia's COUNT LUNA* (Criterion, $4) is subtitled "two tales of the real and the unreal," and explores much the same borderlands of reality which preoccupied, a generation earlier, another Viennese novelist: that neglected master Leo Perutz. But without Perutz's genius for construction, irony and narrative impetus, these two half-real tales (of which the novelet *Baron Bagge* is, technically, fantasy and the title novel is not) seem merely diffuse, difficult, digressive.

Robert A. Heinlein's teen-age novel, TIME FOR THE STARS* (Scribner's, $2.75), is the best new s.f. book I've read in 1956, for any age classification; indeed, the only reas-

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on you didn't read it first in these pages, as adult fiction, is that its construction is not such as to break well for serialization. Heinlein began introducing his young readers to science fiction on quite a simple level, with SPACE CADET; book by book, both the science and the fiction have grown more complex until this latest juvenile offers intensive scientific thinking (particularly on the mathematics and philosophy of time and relativity) and characterization (including some good journeyman psychoanalysis) to such an extent that— Well, if this is the meat of teen-agers, the average "adult" s.f. story aspires no higher than grammar school.

I'm not sure how many of the young will really relish this complexity, even though it's accompanied by a fine adventure story of the first interstellar exploration (with mind-reading twins maintaining the communications-link with Earth); but certainly every adult—and particularly the enthusiastic audience of THE DOOR INTO SUMMER—should mark it down as a must.

For the young who have not been gradually indoctrinated up to Heinlein's present level, you'll find a firstrate introduction to simple but exciting s.f. in Donald A. Wollheim's ONE AGAINST THE MOON* (World, $2.75). All right, so it takes a few whopping coincidences to strand our young hero on the moon (where an even greater whopper awaits him); the Robinson Crusoe theme is so strong and Mr. Wollheim tells it with such convincing, not-wholly-impossible details and such lively narration that I easily achieved suspension of disbelief and even recaptured that rare if much-discussed "sense of wonder."

Paul French's LUCKY STAR AND THE BIG SUN OF MERCURY* (Doubleday, $2.50) is a straightforward interplanetary whodunit about the sabotage of a hyperoptics project on the first planet, neatly plotted and blending action and deduction skilfully enough to remind you that French is a pseudonym of that specialist in the science-fiction-detective-story, Isaac Asimov.

Robert S. Richardson's SECOND SATELLITE* (Whittlesey, $2.75) is contemporary and realistic—no space-spectacular, but the quiet story of a summer at an observatory, during which a scientist's son comes to understand the meaning and excitement of science. Dr. Richardson observes people as ably as he does planets, and his gentle humorous plausibility may seduce many readers who shy away from the extravagance of most "science"-juveniles.

Among other teen-age books, Lester del Rey's MISSION TO THE MOON* (Winston, $2), a sequel to 1954's STEP TO THE STARS, is hastily and episodically sketched, but above average in probability and accuracy. Andrew North's PLAGUE

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SHIP* (Gnome, $2.75) is also marred by careless writing, but offers interesting alien life forms and a good story of interstellar trading. Carey Rockwell's THE ROBOT ROCKET* (Grosset & Dunlap, $1) is generally agreeable if you're still reading on the space-cadet-vs.-space-pirates level, but you'd never believe that Willy Ley was the "technical adviser." There's no point in going into the scientific and fictional deficiencies of Paul Capon's LOST: A MOON* (Bobbs-Merrill, $2.75), Paul V. Dallas' THE LOST PLANET* (Winston, $2), or M. E. Patchett's FLIGHT TO THE MISTY PLANET* (Bobbs-Merrill, $2.75).

For younger readers—say around 10—Carl L. Biemiller's STARBOY* (Holt, $2.50; serialized in *Jack and Jill* as JONNY AND THE BOY FROM SPACE seems excellent, and even adults may find a quiet charm in it. It's a simpler treatment of the theme of the above-mentioned SON OF THE STARS: the achievement of interstellar amity through the friendship of two boys of diverse planets. Jay Williams, familiar to F&SF readers, joins Raymond Abrashkin to write DANNY DUNN AND THE ANTI-GRAVITY PAINT* (Whittlesey, $2.50), a sort of fairytale-farce about spaceflight which rarely concerns itself with scientific likelihood, but concentrates on absurdities of character and events and succeeds in being likably funny.

Dawn Press, a new amateur venture, intends to follow the old Arkham House line of emphasizing fantasy more than s.f., and plans to begin with the 1914 *Cosmopolitan* serial by Arthur Train and Robert W. Wood, THE MOON MAKER, which has never appeared before in book form. Success in such a project depends on the number of advance subscription orders; if you're interested, write to Dawn Press, 140 Harrison St., Buffalo 10, N. Y.

One of the oldest of the fan-founded publishing houses, Fantasy Press, now plans to reissue many of its books in paper bindings at $1 each. The first three titles, now available, are John W. Campbell's THE MOON IS HELL!, Murray Leinster's OPERATION: OUTER SPACE and Edward E. Smith's GALACTIC PATROL. The Campbell is particularly recommended as one of his best stories, and never published in magazine form.

Top recent newsstand reprint is Shepherd Mead's THE BIG BALL OF WAX (Ballantine, 35¢), best of the many satires on a Madison-Avenue future, as shrewd as it is funny. Fredric Brown's MARTIANS GO HOME (Bantam, 35¢) is fine screwball nonsense-cum-logic such as only Brown can purvey. The 13 stories in Theodore Sturgeon's E PLURIBUS UNICORN (Ballantine, 35¢) are a hit-or-miss lot, but even a few Sturgeon hits (and there are some sensational bullseyes here) make any volume worth buying.

*All books marked with asterisks can be obtained through Readers' Book Service. See ad on p. 2.

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The ballad-singer name of John has not appeared here, with his silver-strung guitar and his possible-sack, in over a year; Manly Wade Wellman, his chronicler, has been busy with other things—such as winning the Mystery Writers of America's Edgar award for the best fact-crime book of 1955 with his full-flavored collection of North Carolina murders, DEAD AND GONE, *or revealing rich new historical material in* REBEL BOAST, *the documented account of certain of his kin who were proudly "first at Bethel and last at Appomattox." John's return is in an unexpected guise: as a research assistant at a small college which emulates Duke University in probing into the mysteries of extra-sensory perception . . . with dramatic and eerie results which Dr. Rhine can never hope to duplicate.*

Old Devlins Was A-waiting

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

ALL DAY I'D CLIMBED THROUGH mountain country. Past Rebel Creek I'd climbed, and through Lost Cove, and up and down the slopes of Crouch and Hog Ham and Skeleton Ridge, and finally as the sun hunted the world's edge, I looked over a high saddleback and down on Flornoy College.

Flornoy's up in the hills, plain and poor, but it does good teaching. Country boys who mightn't get past common school else can come and work off the most part of their board and keep and learning. I saw a couple of brick buildings, a row of cottages, and barns for the college farm in the bottom below, with then a paved road to Hilberstown maybe eight, nine miles down valley. Climbing down was another sight farther, and longer work than you'd think, and when I got to the level it was past sundown and the night showed its stars to me.

Coming into the back of the college grounds, I saw a light somewhere this side of the buildings, and then I heard two voices quarreling at each other.

"You leave my lantern be," bade one voice, deep and hacked.

"I wasn't going to blow it out,

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Moon-Eye," the other voice laughed, but sharp and mean. "I just joggled up against it."

"Look out I don't joggle up against you, Rixon Pengraft."

"Maybe you're bigger than I am, but there's such a thing as the difference between a big man and a little one."

Then I was close and saw them, and they saw me. Scholars at Flornoy, I reckoned by the light of the old lantern one of them toted. He was tall, taller than I am, with broad, hunched shoulders, and in the lantern-shine his face looked good in a long, big-nosed way. The other fellow was plumpy-soft, and smoked a cigar that made an orangey coal in the night.

The cigar-smoking one turned toward where I came along with my silver-strung guitar in one hand and my possible-sack in the other.

"What you doing around here," he said to me. Didn't ask it, said it.

"I'm looking for Professor Deal," I replied him. "Any objections?"

He grinned his teeth white around the cigar. The lantern-shine flickered on them. "None I know of. Go on looking."

He turned and moved off in the night. The fellow with the lantern watched him go, then spoke to me.

"I'll take you to Professor Deal's. My name's Anderson Newlands. Folks call me Moon-Eye."

"Folks call me John," I said. "What does Moon-Eye mean?"

He smiled, tight, over the lantern glow. "It's hard for me to see in the night-time, John. I was in the Korean war, I got wounded and had a fever, and my eyes began to trouble me. They're getting better, but I need a lantern any night but when it's full moon."

We walked along. "Was that Rixon Pengraft fellow trying to give you a hard time?" I asked.

"Trying, maybe. He—well, he wants something I'm not really keeping away from him, he just thinks I am."

That's all Moon-Eye Newlands said about it, and I didn't inquire him what he meant. He went on: "I don't want any fuss with Rixon, but if he's bound to have one with me—" Again he stopped his talk. "Yonder's Professor Deal's house, the one with the porch. I'm due there some later tonight, after supper."

He headed off with his lantern, toward the brick building where the scholars slept. On the porch, Professor Deal came out and made me welcome. He's president of Flornoy, strong-built, middling tall, with white hair and a round hard chin like a water-washed rock.

"Haven't seen you since the State Fair," he boomed out, loud enough to talk to the seventy, eighty Flornoy scholars all at once. "Come in the house, John, Mrs. Deal's nearly ready with supper. I want you to meet Dr. McCoy."

I came inside and rested my

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guitar and possible-sack by the door. "Is he a medicine doctor or a teacher doctor?" I asked.

"She's a lady. Dr. Anda Lee McCoy. She observes how people think and how far they see."

"An eye-doctor?"

"Call her an inner-eye doctor, John. She studies what those Duke University people call ESP—extra-sensory perception."

I'd heard of that. A fellow named Rhine says folks can some way tell what other folks think to themselves. He tells it that everybody reads minds a little bit, and some folks read them a right much. Might be you've seen his cards, marked five ways—square, cross, circle, star, wavy lines. Take five of each of those cards and you've got a pack of twenty-five. Somebody shuffles them like for a game and looks at them, one after another. Then somebody else, who can't see the cards, in the next room maybe, tries to guess what's on them. Ordinary chance is for one right guess out of five. But, here and there, it gets called another sight oftener.

"Some old mountain folks would name that witch-stuff," I said to Professor Deal.

"Hypnotism was called witchcraft, until it was shown to be true science," he said back. "Or telling what dreams mean, until Dr. Freud overseas made it scientific. ESP might be a recognized science some day."

"You hold with it, do you, Professor?"

"I hold with anything that's proven," he said. "I'm not sure about ESP yet. Here's Mrs. Deal."

She's a comfortable, clever lady, as white-haired as he is. While I made my manners, Dr. Anda Lee McCoy came from the back of the house.

"Are you the ballad-singer?" she asked me.

I'd expected no doctor lady as young as Dr. Anda Lee McCoy, nor as pretty-looking. She was small and slim, but there was enough of her. She stood straight and wore good city clothes, and had lots of yellow hair and a round happy face and straight-looking blue eyes.

"Professor Deal bade me come see him," I said. "He couldn't get Mr. Bascom Lamar Lunsford to decide something or other about folk songs and tales."

"I'm glad you've come," she welcomed me.

Turned out Dr. McCoy knew Mr. Bascom Lamar Lunsford and thought well of him. Professor Deal had asked for him first, but Mr. Bascom was in Washington, making records of his songs for the Library of Congress. Some folks can't vote which they'd rather hear, Mr. Bascom's five-string banjo or my guitar; but he sure enough knows more old time songs than I do. A few more.

Mrs. Deal went to the kitchen

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to see was supper near about cooked. We others sat down in the front room. Dr. McCoy asked me to sing something, so I got my guitar and gave her "Shiver in the Pines."

"Pretty," she praised. "Do you know a song about killing a captain at a lonesome river ford?"

I thought. "Some of it, maybe. It's a Virginia song, I think. You relish that song, Doctor?"

"I wasn't thinking of my own taste. A student here—a man named Anderson Newlands—doesn't like it at all."

Mrs. Deal called us to supper, and while we ate, Dr. McCoy talked.

"I'll tell you why I asked for someone like you to help me, John," she began. "I've got a theory, or a hypothesis. About dreams."

"Not quite like Freud," put in Professor Deal, "though he'd be interested if he was alive and here."

"It's dreaming the future," said Dr. McCoy.

"Shoo," I said, "that's no theory, that's fact. Bible folks did it. I've done it myself. Once, during the war—"

But that was no tale to tell, what I dreamed in war time and how true it came out. So I stopped, while Dr. McCoy went on.

"There are records of prophecies coming true, even after the prophets died. And another set of records fit in, about images appearing like ghosts. Most of these are ancestors of somebody alive today. Kinship and special sympathy, you know. Sometimes these images, or ghosts, are called from the past by using diagrams and spells. You aren't laughing at me, John?"

"No, ma'am. Things like that aren't likely to be a laughing matter."

"Well, what if dreams of the future come true because somebody goes forward in time while he sleeps or drowses?" she asked us. "That ghost of Nostradamus, reported not long ago—what if Nostradamus himself was called into this present time, and then went back to his own century to set down a prophecy of what he'd seen?"

If she wanted an answer, I didn't have one for her. All I said was: "Do you want to call somebody from the past, ma'am? Or maybe go yourself into a time that's coming?"

She shook her yellow head.

"Put it one way, John, I'm not psychic. Put it another way, the scientific way, I'm not adapted. But this young man Anderson Newlands is the best adapted I've ever found."

She told how some Flornoy students scored high at guessing the cards and their markings. I was right interested to hear that Rixon Pengraft called them well, though Dr. McCoy said his mind got on other things—I reckoned his mind got on her; pretty thing as she was,

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she could take a man's mind. But Anderson Newlands, Moon-Eye Newlands, guessed every card right off as she held the pack, time after time, with nary miss.

"And he dreams of the future, I know," she said. "If he can see the future, he might call to the past."

"By the diagrams and the words?" I inquired her. "How about the science explanation for that?"

It so happened she had one. She told it while we ate our custard pie.

First, that idea that time's the fourth dimension. You're six feet tall, twenty inches wide, twelve inches thick and thirty-five years old; and the thirty-five years of you reach from where you were born one place, across the land and maybe over the sea where you've traveled, and finally to right where you are now, from thousands of miles ago. Then the idea that just a dot here in this second of time we're living in can be a wire back and back and forever back, or a five-inch line is a five-inch bar reaching forever back thataway, or a circle is a tube, and so on. It did make some sense to me, and I asked Dr. McCoy what it added up to.

It added up to the diagram witch-folks draw, with circles and six-pointed stars and letters from an alphabet nobody on this earth can spell out. Well, that diagram might be a cross-section, here in our three dimensions, of something reaching backward or forward, a machine to travel you through time.

"You certain sure about this?" I inquired Dr. McCoy at last. And she smiled, then she frowned, and shook her yellow head again.

"I'm only guessing," she said, "as I might guess with the ESP cards. But I'd like to find out whether the right man could call his ancestor out of the past."

"I still don't figure out about those spoken spell words the witch-folks use," I said.

"A special sound can start a machine," said Professor Deal. "I've seen such things."

"Like the words of the old magic square?" asked Dr. McCoy. "The one they use in spells to call up the dead?"

She got a pencil and scrap of paper, and wrote it out:

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

"I've been seeing that thing a many years," I said. "Witch-folks use it, and it's in witch-books like *The Long Lost Friend*."

"You'll notice," said Dr. McCoy, "that it reads the same, whether you start at the upper left and work down word by word, or at the lower right and read the words

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one by one upward; or if you read it straight down or straight up."

Professor Deal looked, too. "The first two words—SATOR and AREPO—are reversals of the last two. SATOR for ROTAS, and AREPO for OPERA."

"I've heard that before," I braved up to say. "The first two words being the last two, turned around. But the third, fourth and fifth are all right—I've heard tell that TENET means *faith* and OPERA is *works,* and ROTAS something about wheels."

"But SATOR and AREPO are more than just reversed words," Professor Deal said. "I'm no profound Latinist, but I know that SATOR means a sower—a planter—or a beginner or creator."

"Creator," Dr. McCoy jumped on his last word. "That would fit into this if it's a real sentence."

"A sentence, and a palindrome," nodded Professor Deal. "Know what a palindrome is, John?"

I knew that, too, from somewhere. "A sentence that reads the same back and forward," I told him. "Like Napoleon saying, *Able was I ere I saw Elba.* Or the first words Mother Eve heard in the Garden of Eden, *Madam, I'm Adam.* Those are old grandma jokes to pleasure young children."

"If these words are a sentence, they're more than a palindrome," said Dr. McCoy. "They're a double palindrome, because they read the same from any place you start—backward, forward, up or down. Fourfold meaning would be fourfold power as a spell or formula."

"But what's the meaning?" I wanted to know again.

She began to write on a paper. "SATOR," she said out loud, *"the creator.* Whether that's the creator of some machine, or the Creator of all things . . . I suppose it's a machine-creator."

"I reckon the same," I agreed her, "because this doesn't sound to me the kind of way the Creator of all things does His works."

Mrs. Deal smiled and excused herself. We could talk and talk, she said, but she had sewing to do.

"AREPO," Professor Deal kind of hummed to himself. "I wish I had a Latin dictionary, though even then I might not find it. Maybe that's a corruption of *repo* or *erepo*—to crawl or climb—a vulgar form of the word—"

I said nothing. I didn't think Professor Deal would say anything vulgar in front of a lady. But all Dr. McCoy remarked him was: "AREPO—wouldn't that be a noun ablative? By means of?"

"Write it down like that," noddéd Professor Deal. *"By means of creeping, climbing, by means of great effort.* And TENET is the verb *to hold. He holds, the creator holds."*

"OPERA is *works,* and ROTAS is *wheels,"* Dr. McCoy tried to finish up, but this time Professor Deal shook his head.

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"ROTAS probably is accusative plural, in apposition." He cleared his throat, long and loud. "Maybe I never will be sure, but let's read it something like this: *The creator, by means of great effort, holds the wheels for his works.*"

I'd not said a word in all this scholar-talk, till then. "TENET might still be *faith,*" I offered them. "Faith's needed to help the workings. Folks without faith might call the thing foolishness."

"That's sound psychology," said Professor Deal.

"And it fits in with the making of spells," Dr. McCoy added on. "Double meanings, you know. Maybe there are double meanings all along, or triple or fourfold meanings, and all of them true." She read from her paper. *"The creator, by means of great effort, holds the wheels for his works."*

"It might even refer to the orbits of planets," said Professor Deal.

"Where do I come in?" I asked. "Why was I bid here?"

"You can sing something for us," Dr. McCoy replied me, "and you can have faith."

A knocking at the door, and Professor Deal went to let the visitor in. Moon-Eye Newlands walked into the house, lifted his lantern chimney and blew out his light. He looked tall, the way he'd looked when first I met him in the outside dark, and he wore a hickory shirt and blue duckins pants. He smiled, friendly, and, moon-eyed or not, he looked first of all at Dr. McCoy, clear and honest and glad to see her.

"You said you wanted me to help you, Doctor," he greeted her.

"Thank you, Mr. Newlands," she said, gentler and warmer than I'd heard her so far.

"You can call me Moon-Eye, like the rest," he told her.

He was a college scholar, and she was a doctor lady, but they were near about the same age. He'd been off to the Korean War, I remembered.

"Shall we go out on the porch?" she asked us. "Professor Deal said I could draw my diagram there. Bring your guitar, John."

We went out. Moon-Eye lighted his lantern again, and Dr. McCoy knelt down to draw with a piece of chalk.

First she made the word square, in big letters:

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

Around these she made a triangle, a good four feet from base to point. And another triangle across it, pointing the other way, so that the two made what learned folks call the Star of David. Around that, a big circle, with writing along the edge of it, and another big circle around that, to

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close in the writing. I put my back to a porch post. From where I sat I could read the word square all right, but of the writing around the circle I couldn't spell ary letter.

"Folks," said Moon-Eye, "I still can't say I like this."

Kneeling where she drew, Dr. McCoy looked up at him with her blue eyes. "You said you'd help if you could."

"But what if it's not right? My old folks, my grandsires—I don't know if they ought to be called up."

"Moon-Eye," said Professor Deal, "I'm just watching, observing. I haven't yet been convinced of anything due to happen here tonight. But if it should happen—I know your ancestors must have been good country people, nobody to be ashamed of, dead or alive."

"I'm not ashamed of them," Moon-Eye told us all, with a sort of sudden clip in his voice. "I just don't think they were the sort to be stirred up without a good reason."

"Moon-Eye," said Dr. McCoy, talking the way any man who's a man would want a woman to talk to him, "science is the best of reasons in itself."

He didn't speak, didn't deny her, didn't nod his head or either shake it. He just looked at her blue eyes with his dark ones. She got up from where she'd knelt.

"John," she spoke to where I was sitting, "that song we mentioned. About the lonesome river ford. It may put things in the right tune and tempo."

Moon-Eye sat on the edge of the porch, his lantern beside him. The light made our shadows big and jumpy. I began to pick the tune the best I could recollect it, and sang:

"Old Devlins was a-waiting
By the lonesome river ford,
When he spied the Mackey captain
With a pistol and a sword. . . ."

I stopped, for Moon-Eye had tensed himself tight. "I'm not sure of how it goes from there," I said.

"I'm sure of where it goes," said someone in the dark, and up to the porch ambled Rixon Pengraft.

He was smoking that cigar, or maybe a fresh one, grinning around it. He wore a brown corduroy shirt with officers' straps to the shoulders, and brown corduroy pants tucked into shiny half-boots worth maybe twenty-five dollars, the pair of them. His hair was brown, too, and curly, and his eyes were sneaking all over Dr. Anda Lee McCoy.

"Nobody here knows what that song means," said Moon-Eye.

Rixon Pengraft sat down beside Dr. McCoy, on the step below Moon-Eye, and the way he did it, I harked back in my mind to something Moon-Eye had said: about something Rixon Pengraft wanted, and why he hated Moon-Eye over it.

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"I've wondered wasn't the song about the Confederate War," said Rixon. "Maybe *Mackey captain* means Yankee captain."

"No, it doesn't," said Moon-Eye, and his teeth sounded on each other.

"I can sing it, anyway," said Rixon, twiddling his cigar in his teeth and winking at Dr. McCoy. "Go on picking."

"Go on," Dr. McCoy repeated, and Moon-Eye said nothing. I touched the silver strings, and Rixon Pengraft sang:

"'Old Devlins, Old Devlins,
I know you mighty well,
You're six foot three of Satan,
Two hundred pounds of hell....'"

And he stopped. "Devils—Satan," he said. "Might be it's a song about the Devil. Think we ought to go on singing about him, with no proper respect?"

He went on:

"Old Devlins was ready,
He feared not beast or man,
He shot the sword and pistol
From the Mackey captain's hand. . . ."

Moon-Eye looked once at the diagram, chalked out on the floor of the porch. He didn't seem to hear Rixon Pengraft's mocking voice with the next verse:

"'Old Devlins, Old Devlins,
Oh, won't you spare my life?
I've got three little children
And a kind and loving wife.'

"'God bless them little children,
And I'm sorry for your wife,
But turn your back and close your eyes,
I'm going to take your—'"

"Leave off that singing!" yelled Moon-Eye Newlands, and he was on his feet in the yard so quick we hadn't seen him move. He took a long step toward where Rixon Pengraft sat beside Dr. McCoy, and Rixon got up quick, too, and dropped his cigar and moved away.

"You know the song," blared out Moon-Eye. "Maybe you know what man you're singing about!"

"Maybe I do know," said Rixon.

"You want to bring him here to look at you?"

We were all up on our feet. We watched Moon-Eye standing over Rixon, and Moon-Eye just then looked about two feet taller than he had before. Maybe even more than that, to Rixon.

"If that's how you're going to be—" began Rixon.

"That's how I'm going to be," Moon-Eye told him, his voice right quiet again. "I'm honest to tell you, that's how I'm going to be."

"Then I won't stay here," said Rixon. "I'll leave, because you're making so much noise in front of a lady. But, Moon-Eye, I'm not scared of you. Nor yet the ghost of any ancestor you ever had, Devlins or anybody else."

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Rixon smiled at Dr. McCoy and walked away. We heard him start to whistle in the dark. He meant it for banter, but I couldn't help but think about the boy whistling his way through the graveyard.

Then I happened to look back at the diagram on the porch. And it didn't seem right for a moment, it looked like something else. The two circles, with the string of writing between them, the six-point star, and in the very middle of everything the word square:

S A T O R
A R E P O
T E N E T
O P E R A
R O T A S

"Shoo," I said. "Look, folks, that word square's turned around."

"Naturally," said Professor Deal, plain glad to talk and think about something beside how Moon-Eye and Rixon had acted. "The first two words are reversals of the—"

"I don't mean that, Professor." I pointed. "Look. I take my Bible oath that Dr. McCoy wrote it out so that it read rightly from where I am now. But it's gone upside down."

"That's the truth," Moon-Eye agreed me.

"Yes," said Dr. McCoy. "Yes. You know what that means?"

"The square's turned around?" asked Professor Deal.

"The whole thing's turned around. The whole diagram. Spun a whole hundred and eighty degrees—maybe several times—and stopped again. Why?" She put her hand on Moon-Eye's elbow, and the hand trembled. "The thing was beginning to work, to revolve, the machine was going to operate—"

"You're right." Moon-Eye put his big hand over her little one. "Just when the singing stopped."

He moved away from her and picked up his lantern. He started away.

"Come back, Moon-Eye!" she called after him. "It can't work without you!"

"I've got something to see Rixon Pengraft about," he said.

"You can't hit him, you're bigger than he is!" I thought she was going to run and catch up with him.

"Stay here," I told her. "I'll go talk to him."

I walked quick to catch up with Moon-Eye. "Big things were near about to happen just now," I said.

"I realize that, Mr. John. But it won't go on, because I won't be there to help it." He lifted his lantern and stared at me. "I said my old folks weren't the sort you ruffle up for no reason."

"Was the song about your folks?"

"Sort of."

"You mean, Old Devlins?"

"That's not just exactly his name, but he was my great-grandsire on

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my mother's side. Rixon Pengraft caught onto that, and after what he said—"

"You heard that doctor lady say Rixon isn't as big as you are, Moon-Eye," I argued him. "You hit him and she won't like it."

He stalked on toward the brick building where the scholars had their rooms.

Bang!

The lantern went out with a smash of glass.

The two of us stopped still in the dark and stared. Up ahead, in the brick building, a head and shoulders made itself black in a lighted window, and a cigar-coal glowed.

"I said I didn't fear you, Moon-Eye!" laughed the voice of Rixon Pengraft. "Nor I don't fear Old Devlins, whatever kin he is to you!"

A black arm waved something. It was a rifle. Moon-Eye drew himself up tall in the dark.

"Help me, John," he said. "I can't see a hand before me."

"You going to fight him, Moon-Eye? When he has that gun?"

"Help me back to Professor Deal's." He put his hand on my shoulder and gripped down hard. "Get me into the light."

"What do you aim to do?"

"Something there wasn't a reason to do, till now."

That was the last the either of us said. We walked back. Nobody was on the porch, but the door was open. We stepped across the chalk-drawn diagram and into the front room. Professor Deal and Dr. McCoy stood looking at us.

"You've come back," Dr. McCoy said to Moon-Eye, the gladdest you'd ever call for a lady to say. She made a step toward him and put out her hand.

"I heard a gun go off out there," she said.

"My lantern got shot to pieces," Moon-Eye told her. "I've come back to do what you bid me do. John, if you don't know the song —"

"I do know it, Moon-Eye," I said. "I stopped because I thought you didn't want it."

"I want it now," he rang out his voice. "If my great-grandsire can be called here tonight, call him. Sing it, John."

I still carried my guitar. I slanted it across me and picked the strings:

"He killed the Mackey captain,
He went behind the hill,
Them Mackeys never caught him,
And I know they never will. . . ."

"Great-grandsire!" yelled out Moon-Eye, so that the walls shook with his cry. "I've taken a right much around here, because I thought it might be best thataway. But tonight Rixon Pengraft dared you, said he didn't fear you! Come and show him what it's like to be afraid!"

"Now, now—" began Professor Deal, then stopped it.

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I sang on:

"When there's no moon in heaven
And you hear the hound-dogs bark,
You can guess that it's Old Devlins
A-scrambling in the dark. . . ."

Far off outside, a hound-dog barked in the moonless night.

And on the door sounded a thumpety-bang knock, the way you'd think the hand that knocked had knuckles of mountain rock.

I saw Dr. McCoy weave and sway on her little feet like a bush in a wind, and her blue eyes got the biggest they'd been yet. But Moon-Eye just smiled, hard and sure, as Professor Deal walked heavy to the door and opened it.

Next moment he sort of gobbled in his throat, and tried to shove the door closed again, but he wasn't quick enough. A wide hat with a long dark beard under it showed through the door, then big, hunched shoulders like Moon-Eye's. And, spite of the Professor's shoving, the door came open all the way, and in slid the long-bearded, big-shouldered man among us.

He stood without moving inside the door. He was six feet three, all right, and I reckoned he'd weigh at two hundred pounds. He wore a frocktail coat and knee boots of cowhide. His left arm cradled a rifle-gun near about as long as he was, and its barrel was eight-squared, the way you hardly see any more. His big broad right hand came up and took off the wide hat.

Then we could see his face, such a face as I'm not likely to forget. Big nose and bright glaring eyes, and that beard I tell you about, that fell down like a curtain from the high cheekbones and just under the nose. Wild, he looked, and proud, and deadly as his weight in blasting powder with the fuse already spitting. I reckon that old Stonewall Jackson might have had something of that favor, if ever he'd turned his back on the Lord God.

"I thought I was dreaming this," he said to us, deep as somebody talking from a well-bottom, "but I begin to figure the dream's come true."

His eyes came around to me, those terrible eyes, that shone like two drawn knives.

"You called me a certain name in your song," he said. "I've been made mad by that name, on the wrong mouth."

"Devlins?" I said.

"Devil Anse," he nodded. "The McCoy crowd named me that. My right name's Captain Anderson Hatfield, and I hear that somebody around here took a shoot at my great-grandboy." He studied Moon-Eye. "That's you, ain't it, son?"

"Now wait, whoever you are—" began Professor Deal.

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"I'm Captain Anderson Hatfield," he named himself again, and lowered his rifle-gun. Its butt thumped the floor like a falling tree.

"That shooting," Professor Deal made out to yammer. "I didn't hear it."

"I heared it," said Devil Anse, "and likewise I heared the slight put on me by the shooter."

"I—I don't want any trouble—" the Professor still tried to argue.

"Nor you won't have none, if you hear me," said Devil Anse. "But keep quiet. And look out yonder."

We looked out the open door. Just at the porch stood the shadows of three men, wide-hatted, tall, leaning on their guns.

"Since I was obliged to come," said Devil Anse Hatfield, and his voice was as deep now as Moon-Eye's, "I reckoned not to come alone." He spoke into the night. "Jonce?"

"Yes, pa."

"You'll be running things here. You and Vic and Cotton Top keep your eyes cut this way. Nobody's to go from this house, for the law nor for nothing else."

"Yes, pa."

Devil Anse Hatfield turned back to face us. We looked at him, and thought about who he was.

All those years back, sixty, seventy, we thought to the Big Sandy that flows between West Virginia and Kentucky. And the fighting between the Hatfields and the McCoys, over what beginning nobody can rightly say today, but fighting that brought blood and death and sorrow to all that part of the world. And the efforts to make it cease, by every kind of arguer and officer, that couldn't keep the Hatfields and the McCoys apart from each other's throats. And here he was, Devil Anse Hatfield, from that time and place, picking me out with his eyes.

"You who sung the song," he nodded me. "Come along."

I put down my guitar. "Proud to come with you, Captain," I said.

His hand on my shoulder gripped like Moon-Eyes, a bear-trap grip there. We walked out the door, and off the porch past the three waiting tall shadows, and on across the grounds in the night toward that brick sleeping building.

"You know where we're going?" I inquired him.

"Seems to me I do. This seems like the way. What's your name?"

"John, Captain."

"John, I left Moon-Eye back there because he called for me to come handle things. He felt it was my business, talking to that fellow. I can't lay tongue to his name right off."

"Rixon Pengraft?"

"Rixon Pengraft," he repeated me. "Yes, I dreamed that name. Here we are. Open that door for us."

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I'd never been in that building. Nor either had Devil Anse Hatfield, except maybe in what dreams he'd had to bring him there. But, if he'd found his way from the long ago, he found the way to where he was headed. We walked along the hallway inside, between doors, until he stopped me at one. "Knock," he bade me, and I put my fist to the wood.

A laugh inside, mean and shaky. "That you, Moon-Eye Newlands?" said Rixon Pengraft's voice. "You think you dare come in here? I've not locked myself in. Turn the knob, if you're man enough."

Devil Anse nudged my shoulder, and I opened the door and shoved it in, and we came across the threshold together.

Rixon sat on his bed, with a little old twenty-two rifle across his lap.

"Glad you had the nerve, Moon-Eye," he began to say, "because there's only room for one of us to sit next to Anda Lee McCoy—"

Then his mouth stayed open, with the words ceasing to come out.

"Rixon," said Devil Anse, "you know who I am?"

Rixon's eyes hung out of his head like two scuppernong grapes on a vine. They twitchy-climbed up Devil Anse, from his boots to his hat, and they got bigger and scareder all the time.

"I don't believe it," said Rixon Pengraft, almost too sick and weak for an ear to hear him.

"You'd better have the man to believe it. You sang about me. Named me Devil Anse in the song, and knew it was about me. Thought it would be right funny if I did come where you were."

At last that big hand quitted my shoulder, and moved to bring that long eight-square rifle to the ready.

"Don't!"

Rixon was on his knees, and his own little toy gun spilled on the floor between us. He was able to believe now.

"Listen," Rixon jibber-jabbered, "I didn't mean anything. It was just a joke on Moon-Eye."

"A mighty sorry joke," said Devil Anse. "I never yet laughed at a gun going off." His boot-toe shoved the twenty-two. "Not even a baby-boy gun like that."

"I—" Rixon tried to say, and he had to stop to get strength. "I'll—"

"You'll break up that there gun," Devil Anse decreed him.

"Break my gun?" Rixon was still on his knees, but his scared eyes managed to get an argue-look.

"Break it," said Devil Anse. "I'm a-waiting, Rixon. Just like that time I waited by a lonesome river ford."

And his words were as cold and slow as chunks of ice floating down a half-choked stream in winter.

Rixon put out his hand for the twenty-two. His eyes kept hold on Devil Anse. Rixon lifted one knee

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from the floor, and laid the twenty-two across it. He tugged at barrel and stock.

"Harder than that," said Devil Anse. "Let's see if you got any muscle to match your loud mouth."

Rixon tugged again, and then Devil Anse's rifle stirred. Rixon saw, and really made out to work at it. The little rifle broke at the balance. I heard the wood crack and splinter.

"All right now," said Devil Anse, still deep and cold and slow. "You're through with them jokes you think are so funny. Fling them chunks of gun out yonder."

He wagged his head at the open door, and Rixon flung the broken pieces into the hall.

"Stay on your knees," Devil Anse bade him. "You got praying to do. Pray the good Lord your thanks you got off so lucky. Because if there's another time you see me, I'll be the last thing you see this side of the hell I'm six foot three of."

To me he said: "Come on, John. We've done with this no-excuse for a man who's broke his own gun."

Back we went, and nary word between us. The other three Hatfields stood by Professor Deal's porch, quiet as painted shadows of three gun-carrying men. In at the door we walked, and there was Professor Deal, and over against the other side of the room stood Moon-Eye and Dr. McCoy.

"Rixon named somebody McCoy here," said Devil Anse. "Who owns up to the name?"

"I do," said she, gentle but steady.

"You hold away from her, Great-grandsire," spoke up Moon-Eye.

"Boy," said Devil Anse, "you telling me what to do and not do?"

"I'm telling you, Great-grandsire."

I looked at those two tall big-nosed men from two times in the same family's story, and, saving Devil Anse's beard, and maybe thirty-some-odd years, you couldn't have called for two folks who favored each other's looks more.

"Boy," said Devil Anse, "you trying to scare me?"

"No, Great-grandsire. I'm not trying to scare you."

Devil Anse smiled. His smile made his face look the terriblest he'd looked so far.

"Now, that's good. Because I never been scared in all my days on this earth."

"I'm just telling you, Great-grandsire," said Moon-Eye. "You hold away from her."

Dr. McCoy stood close to Moon-Eye, and all of a sudden Moon-Eye put his hickory-sleeved arm round her and drew her closer still.

Devil Anse put his eyes on them. That terrible smile crawled away out of his beard, like a deadly poison snake out of grass, and we saw it no more.

"Great-grandboy," he said, "it wasn't needful for you to get me

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told. I made a mistake once with a McCoy girl. Jonce—my son standing out yonder—loved and courted her. Roseanna was her name."

"Roseanna," said the voice of Jonce Hatfield outside.

"I never gave them leave to marry," said Devil Anse. "Wish I had now. It would have saved a sight of trouble and grief and killing. And nobody yet ever heared me say that."

His eyes relished Dr. McCoy, and it was amazing to see that they could be quiet eyes, kind eyes.

"Now, girl," he said, "even if you might be close kin to Old Ran McCoy—"

"I'm not sure of the relationship," she said. "If it's there, I'm not ashamed."

"Nor you needn't be." His beard went down and up as he nodded her. "I've fit the McCoy set for years, and not once found ary scared soul among them. Ain't no least drop of coward blood in their veins." He turned. "I'll be going."

"Going?" asked Professor Deal.

"Yes, sir. Goodnight to the all of you."

He went through the door, hat, beard and rifle, and closed it behind him, and off far again we could hear that hound-dog bark.

We were quiet as a dead hog there in the room. Finally:

"Well, God bless my soul!" said Professor Deal.

"It happened," I said.

"But it won't be believed, John," he went on. "No sane person will ever believe who wasn't here."

I turned to say something to Moon-Eye and Dr. McCoy. But they were looking at each other, and Moon-Eye's both arms were around that doctor lady. And if I had said whatever I had in mind to say, they'd not have been hearing me.

Mrs. Deal said something from that room where she'd gone to do her sewing, and Professor Deal walked off to join her. I felt I might be one too many, too, just then. I picked up my silver-strung guitar and went outside after Devil Anse Hatfield.

He wasn't there, nor yet those who'd come with him. But on the porch was the diagram in chalk, and I had enough light to see that the word-square read right side up again, the way it had been first set down by Dr. Anda Lee McCoy.

McCoy. Mackey. Devlins. Devil Anse. Names change in the old songs, but the power is still there. Naturally, the way my habit is, I began to pick at my silver strings, another song I'd heared from time to time as I'd wandered the hills and hollows:

Up on the top of the mountain,
Away from the sins of this world,
Anse Hatfield's son, he laid down his gun
And dreamed about Ran McCoy's girl. . . .

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Unlikely though it may even seem after the overemphasis on telepathy in recent science fiction, there is still something new to be said on the subject; and Poul Anderson says it pointedly in a story at once tender and tough-minded.

Journeys End

by POUL ANDERSON

—doctor bill & twinges in chest but must be all right maybe indigestion & dinner last night & wasn't audrey giving me the glad eye & how the hell is a guy to know & maybe i can try and find out & what a fool i can look if she doesn't—

—goddam idiot & they shouldn't let some people drive & oh all right so the examiner was pretty lenient with me i haven't had a bad accident yet & christ blood all over my blood let's face it i'm scared to drive but the buses are no damn good & straight up three paces & man in a green hat & judas i ran that red light—

In fifteen years a man got used to it, more or less. He could walk down the street and hold his own thoughts to himself while the surf of unvoiced voices was a nearly ignored mumble in his brain. Now and then, of course, you got something very bad, it stood up in your skull and shrieked at you.

Norman Kane, who had come here because he was in love with a girl he had never seen, got to the corner of University and Shattuck just when the light turned against him. He paused, fetching out a cigaret with nicotine-yellowed fingers while traffic slithered in front of his eyes.

It was an unfavorable time, 4:30 in the afternoon, homeward rush of nervous systems jangled with weariness and hating everything else on feet or wheels. Maybe he should have stayed in the bar down the street. It had been pleasantly cool and dim, the bartender's mind an amiable cud-chewing somnolence, and he could have suppressed awareness of the woman.

No, maybe not. When the city had scraped your nerves raw, they didn't have much resistance to the slime in some heads.

Odd, he reflected, how often the outwardly polite ones were the foully twisted inside. They

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wouldn't dream of misbehaving in public, but just below the surface of consciousness . . . . Better not think of it, better not remember. Berkeley was at least preferable to San Francisco or Oakland. The bigger the town, the more evil it seemed to hold, three centimeters under the frontal bone. New York was almost literally uninhabitable.

There was a young fellow waiting beside Kane. A girl came down the sidewalk, pretty, long yellow hair and a well-filled blouse. Kane focused idly on her: yes, she had an apartment of her own, which she had carefully picked for a tolerant superintendent. Lechery jumped in the young man's nerves. His eyes followed the girl, Cobean-style, and she walked on . . . simple harmonic motion.

Too bad. They could have enjoyed each other. Kane chuckled to himself. He had nothing against honest lust, anyhow not in his liberated conscious mind; he couldn't do much about a degree of subconscious puritanism. Lord, you can't be a telepath and remain any kind of prude. People's lives were their own business, if they didn't hurt anyone else too badly.

—*the trouble is,* he thought, *they hurt me. but i can't tell them that. they'd rip me apart and dance on the pieces. the government /the military/ wouldn't like a man to be alive who could read secrets but their fear-inspired anger would be like a baby's tantrum beside the red blind amok of the common man (thoughtful husband considerate father good honest worker earnest patriot) whose inward sins were known. you can talk to a priest or a psychiatrist because it is only talk & he does not live your failings with you—*

The light changed and Kane started across. It was clear fall weather, not that this area had marked seasons, a cool sunny day with a small wind blowing up the street from the water. A few blocks ahead of him, the University campus was a splash of manicured green under brown hills.

—*flayed & burningburningburning moldering rotted flesh & the bones the white hard clean bones coming out gwtjklfmx—*

Kane stopped dead. Through the vertigo he felt how sweat was drenching into his shirt.

And it was such an ordinary-looking man!

"Hey, there, buster, wake up! Ya wanna get killed?"

Kane took a sharp hold on himself and finished the walk across the street. There was a bench at the bus stop and he sat down till the trembling was over.

Some thoughts were unendurable.

He had a trick of recovery. He went back to Father Schliemann. The priest's mind had been like a well, a deep well under sun-speckled trees, its surface brightened with a few gold-colored autumn

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leaves . . . but there was nothing bland about the water, it had a sharp mineral tang, a smell of the living earth. He had often fled to Father Schliemann, in those days of puberty when the telepathic power had first wakened in him. He had found good minds since then, happy minds, but never one so serene, none with so much strength under the gentleness.

"I don't want you hanging around that papist, boy, do you understand?" It was his father, the lean implacable man who always wore a black tie. "Next thing you know, you'll be worshipping graven images just like him."

"But they *aren't*—"

His ears could still ring with the cuff. "Go up to your room! I don't want to see you till tomorrow morning. And you'll have two more chapters of Deuteronomy memorized by then. Maybe that'll teach you the true Christian faith."

Kane grinned wryly and lit another cigaret from the end of the previous one. He knew he smoked too much. And drank—but not heavily. Drunk, he was defenceless before the horrible tides of thinking.

He had had to run away from home at the age of fourteen. The only other possibility was conflict ending with reform school. It had meant running away from Father Schliemann too, but how in hell's red fires could a sensitive adolescent dwell in the same house as his father's brain? Were the psychologists now admitting the possibility of a sadistic masochist? Kane *knew* the type existed.

Give thanks for this much mercy, that the extreme telepathic range was only a few hundred yards. And a mind-reading boy was not altogether helpless; he could evade officialdom and the worst horrors of the underworld. He could find a decent elderly couple at the far end of the continent and talk himself into adoption.

Kane shook himself and got up again. He threw the cigaret to the ground and stubbed it out with his heel. A thousand examples told him what obscure sexual symbolism was involved in that act, but what the deuce . . . it was also a practical thing. Guns are phallic too, but at times you need a gun.

Weapons: he could not help wincing as he recalled dodging the draft in 1949. He'd traveled enough to know this country was worth defending. But it hadn't been any trick at all to hoodwink a psychiatrist and get himself marked hopelessly psychoneurotic—which he would be after two years penned with frustrated men. There had been no choice, but he could not escape a sense of dishonor.

—haven't we all sinned [every one of us] is there a single human creature on earth without his burden of shame?—

A man was coming out of the drugstore beside him. Idly, Kane

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probed his mind. You could go quite deeply into anyone's self if you cared to, in fact you couldn't help doing so. It was impossible merely to scan verbalized thinking: the organism is too closely integrated. Memory is not a passive filing cabinet, but a continuous process beneath the level of consciousness; in a way, you are always reliving your entire past. And the more emotionally charged the recollection is, the more powerfully it radiates.

The stranger's name was—no matter. His personality was as much an unchangeable signature as his fingerprints. Kane had gotten into the habit of thinking of people as such-and-such a multidimensional symbolic topography; the name was an arbitrary gabble.

The man was an assistant professor of English at the University. Age 42, married, three children, making payments on a house in Albany. Steady sober type, but convivial, popular with his colleagues, ready to help out most friends. He was thinking about tomorrow's lectures, with overtones of a movie he wanted to see and an undercurrent of fear that he might have cancer after all, in spite of what the doctor said.

Below, the list of his hidden crimes. As a boy: tormenting a cat, well-buried Oedipean hungers, masturbation, petty theft . . . the usual. Later: cheating on a few exams, that ludicrous fumbling attempt with a girl which came to nothing because he was too nervous, the time he crashed a cafeteria line and had been shoved away with a cold remark (and praises be, Jim who had seen that was now living in Chicago) . . . still later: wincing memories of a stomach uncontrollably rumbling at a formal dinner, that woman in his hotel room the night he got drunk at the convention, standing by and letting old Carver be fired because he didn't have the courage to protest to the dean . . . now: youngest child a nasty whining little snotnose, but you can't show anyone what you really think, reading Rosamond Marshall when alone in his office, disturbing young breasts in tight sweaters, the petty spite of academic politics, giving Simonson an undeserved good grade because the boy was so beautiful, disgraceful sweating panic when at night he considered how death would annihilate his ego—

And what of it? This assistant professor was a good man, a kindly and honest man, his inwardness ought to be between him and the Recording Angel. Few of his thoughts had ever become deeds, or ever would. Let him bury them himself, let him be alone with them. Kane ceased focusing on him.

The telepath had grown tolerant. He expected little of anyone; nobody matched the mask, except possibly Father Schliemann and a

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few others . . . and those were human too, with human failings, the difference was that they knew peace. It was the emotional overtones of guilt which made Kane wince. God knew he himself was no better. Worse, maybe, but then his life had thrust him to it. If you had an ordinary human sex drive, for instance, but could not endure to cohabit with the thoughts of a woman, your life became one of fleeting encounters; there was no help for it, even if your austere boyhood training still protested.

"Pardon me, got a match?" *—lynn is dead/ i still can't understand it that i will never see her again & eventually you learn how to go on in a chopped-off fashion but what do you do in the meantime how do you get through the nights alone—*

"Sure." *—maybe that is the worst: sharing sorrow and unable to help & only able to give him a light for his cigaret—*

Kane put the matches back in his pocket and went on up University, pausing again at Oxford. A pair of large campus buildings jutted up to the left; others were visible ahead and to the right, through a screen of eucalyptus trees. Sunlight and shadow damascened the grass. From a passing student's mind he discovered where the library was. A good big library —perhaps it held a clue, buried somewhere in the periodical files. He had already arranged for permission to use the facilities: prominent young author doing research for his next novel.

Crossing wistfully named Oxford Street, Kane smiled to himself. Writing was really the only possible occupation: he could live in the country and be remote from the jammed urgency of his fellow men. And with such an understanding of the soul as was his, with any five minutes on a corner giving him a dozen stories, he made good money at it. The only drawback was the trouble of avoiding publicity, editorial summons to New York, autographing parties, literary teas . . . he didn't like those. But you could remain faceless if you insisted.

They said nobody but his agent knew who B. Traven was. It had occurred, wildly, to Kane that Traven might be another like himself. He had gone on a long journey to find out. . . . No. He was alone on earth, a singular and solitary mutant, except for—

It shivered in him, again he sat on the train. It had been three years ago, he was in the club car having a nightcap while the streamliner ran eastward through the Wyoming darkness. They passed a westbound train; not so elegant a one. His drink leaped from his hand to the floor and he sat for a moment in stinging blindness. That flicker of thought, brushing his mind and coming aflame with recognition and then borne away

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again . . . Damn it, damn it, he should have pulled the emergency cord and so should *she*. They should have halted both trains and stumbled through cinders and sagebrush and found each other's arms.

Too late. Three years yielded only a further emptiness. Somewhere in the land there was, or there had been, a young woman, and she was a telepath and the startled touch of her mind had been gentle. There had not been time to learn anything else. Since then he had given up on private detectives. (How could you tell them: "I'm looking for a girl who was on such-and-such a train the night of—"?) Personal ads in all the major papers had brought him nothing but a few crank letters. Probably she didn't read the personals; he'd never done so till his search began, there was too much unhappiness to be found in them if you understood humankind as well as he did.

Maybe this library here, some unnoticed item . . . but if there are two points in a finite space and one moves about so as to pass through every infinitesimal volume dV, it will encounter the other one in finite time *provided* that the other point is not moving too.

Kane shrugged and went along the curving way to the gatehouse. It was slightly uphill. There was a bored cop in the shelter, to make sure that only authorized cars were parked on campus. The progress paradox a ton or so of steel, burning irreplaceable petroleum to shift one or two human bodies around, and doing the job so well that it becomes universal and chokes the cities which spawned it. A telepathic society would be more rational. When every little wound in the child's soul could be felt and healed . . . when the thick burden of guilt was laid down, because everyone knew that everyone else had done the same . . . when men could not kill, because soldier and murderer felt the victim die . . .

—adam & eve? you can't breed a healthy race out of two people. but if we had telepathic children/ & we would be bound to do so i think because the mutation is obviously recessive/ then we could study the heredity of it & the gift would be passed on to other bloodlines in logical distribution & every generation there would be more of our kind until we could come out openly & even the mind mutes could be helped by our psychiatrists & priests & earth would be fair and clean and sane—

There were students sitting on the grass, walking under the Portland Cement Romanesque of the buildings, calling and laughing and talking. The day was near an end. Now there would be dinner, a date, a show, maybe some beer at Robbie's or a drive up into the hills to neck and watch the lights below like trapped stars and the

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mighty constellation of the Bay Bridge . . . or perhaps, with a face-saving grumble about mid-terms, an evening of books, a world suddenly opened. It must be good to be young and mindmute. A dog trotted down the walk and Kane relaxed into the simple wordless pleasure of being a healthy and admired collie.

—so perhaps it is better to be a dog than a man? no /surely not/ for if a man knows more grief he also knows more joy & so it is to be a telepath: more easily hurt yes but /god/ think of the mindmutes always locked away in aloneness and think of sharing not only a kiss but a soul with your beloved—

The uphill trend grew steeper as he approached the library, but Kane was in fair shape and rather enjoyed the extra effort. At the foot of the stairs he paused for a quick cigaret before entering. A passing woman flicked eyes across him and he learned that he could also smoke in the lobby. Mind-reading had its everyday uses. But it was good to stand here in the sunlight. He stretched, reaching out physically and mentally.

—let's see now the integral of log x dx *well make a substitution suppose we call* y *equal to log* x *then this is interesting i wonder who wrote that line about euclid has looked on beauty bare—*

Kane's cigaret fell from his mouth.

It seemed that the wild hammering of his heart must drown out the double thought that rivered in his brain, the thought of a physics student, a very ordinary young man save that he was quite wrapped up in the primitive satisfaction of hounding down a problem, and the other thought, the one that was listening in.

—she—

He stood with closed eyes, asway on his feet, breathing as if he ran up a mountain. *—are You there? are You there?—*

—not daring to believe: what do i feel?—

—i was the man on the train—

—& i was the woman—

A shuddering togetherness.

"Hey! Hey, mister, is anything wrong?"

Almost Kane snarled. Her thought was so remote, on the very rim of indetectability, he could get nothing but subvocalized words, nothing of the self, and this busybody— "No, thanks, I'm OK, just a, a little winded." *—where are You, where can i find You o my darling?—*

—image of a large white building/ right over here & they call it dwinelle hall & i am sitting on the bench outside & please come quickly please be here i never thought this could become real—

Kane broke into a run. For the first time in fifteen years, he was unaware of his human surroundings. There were startled looks, he didn't see them, he was run-

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ning to her and she was running too.

—my name is norman kane & i was not born to that name but took it from people who adopted me because i fled my father (horrible how mother died in darkness & he would not let her have drugs though it was cancer & he said drugs were sinful and pain was good for the soul & he really honestly believed that) & when the power first appeared i made slips and he beat me and said it was witchcraft & i have searched all my life since & i am a writer but only because i must live but it was not aliveness until this moment—

—o my poor kicked beloved/ i had it better/ in me the power grew more slowly and i learned to cover it & i am 20 years old & came here to study but what are books at this moment—

He could see her now. She was not conventionally beautiful, but neither was she ugly, and there was kindness in her eyes and on her mouth.

—what shall i call you? to me you will always be You but there must be a name for the mind-mutes & i have a place in the country among old trees & such few people as live nearby are good folk/ as good as life will allow them to be—

—then let me come there with you & never leave again—

They reached each other and stood a foot apart. There was no need for a kiss or even a hand-clasp . . . not yet. It was the minds which leaped out and enfolded and became one.

—I REMEMBER THAT AT THE AGE OF THREE I DRANK OUT OF THE TOILET BOWL/ THERE WAS A PECULIAR FASCINATION TO IT & I USED TO STEAL LOOSE CHANGE FROM MY MOTHER THOUGH SHE HAD LITTLE ENOUGH TO CALL HER OWN SO I COULD SNEAK DOWN TO THE DRUGSTORE FOR ICE CREAM & I SQUIRMED OUT OF THE DRAFT & THESE ARE THE DIRTY EPISODES INVOLVING WOMEN—

—AS A CHILD I WAS NOT FOND OF MY GRANDMOTHER THOUGH SHE LOVED ME AND ONCE I PLAYED THE FOLLOWING FIENDISH TRICK ON HER & AT THE AGE OF SIXTEEN I MADE AN UTTER FOOL OF MYSELF IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER & I HAVE BEEN PHYSICALLY CHASTE CHIEFLY BECAUSE OF FEAR BUT MY VICARIOUS EXPERIENCES ARE NUMBERED IN THE THOUSANDS—

Eyes watched eyes with horror.

—it is not that you have sinned for i know everyone has done the same or similar things or would if they had our gift & i know too that it is nothing serious or abnormal & of course you have decent instincts & are ashamed—

—just so/ it is that you know what i have done & you know every last little wish & thought & buried uncleanness & in the top of my head i know it doesn't mean anything but down underneath is all which was drilled into me when

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i was just a baby & i will not admit to ANYONE *else that such things exist in* ME—

A car whispered by, homeward bound. The trees talked in the light sunny wind.

A boy and girl went hand in hand.

The thought hung cold under the sky, a single thought in two minds.

—*get out. i hate your bloody guts.*—

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The Antique Heroes

by C. DAY LEWIS

Faultlessly those antique heroes
  Went through their tests and paces,
Meeting the most extraordinary phenomena
  With quite impassive faces.

Dragons, chimeras, sirens, ogres
  Were all in the day's work;
From acorn to dryad, from home to the Hesperides
  No further than next week.

There was always someone who would give them
    something
  Still more impossible to do,
And a divinity on call to help them
  See the assignment through.

The functions of the heroine were,
  Though pleasurable, more narrow —
Receiving a god, generally Zeus,
  And breeding another hero.

It gave life an added interest for all
  Compliant girls, to know
That a bull, a swan, a yokel might be
  Deity incognito . . .

Scholars dispute if such tales were chiefly
  The animist's childwise vision,
Ancestor-snobbery, or a kind of
  Archaic science fiction.

Well, I have seen a clutch of hydras
  Slithering round N. Y. 22,
And Odysseus striding from the airport. I think
  Those tales could be strictly true.

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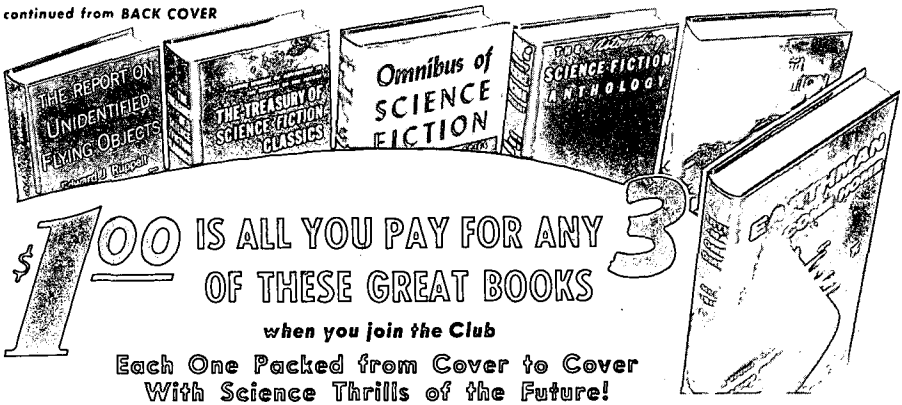
continued from BACK COVER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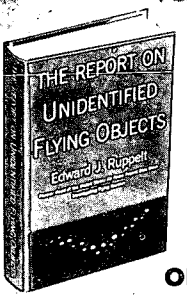

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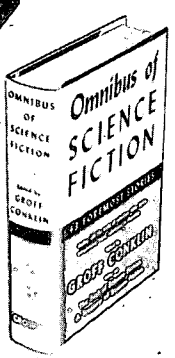

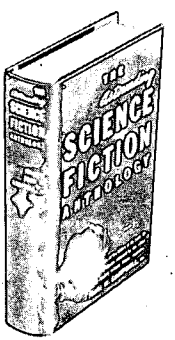

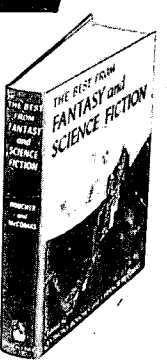

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